

# Stories of Italy



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“Books that you may carry  
to the fire, and hold readily  
in your hand, are the most  
useful after all”

—JOHNSON



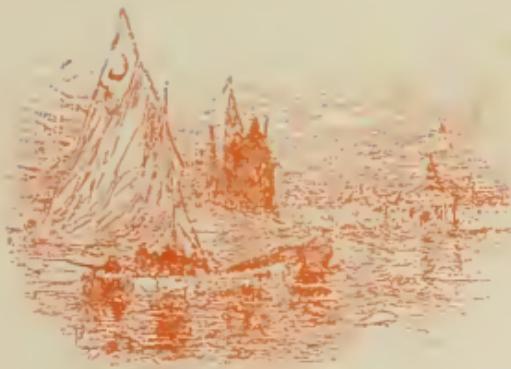
STORIES OF ITALY



STORIES FROM SCRIBNER



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**STORIES OF ITALY**



ESPERO GORGONI, GONDOLIER

BY F. HOPKINSON SMITH

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THE ANATOMIST OF THE HEART

BY T. R. SULLIVAN

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THE SONG OF THE COMFORTER

BY JOHN J. A'BECKET

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THE HOUSE ON THE HILLTOP

BY GRACE ELLERY CHANNING

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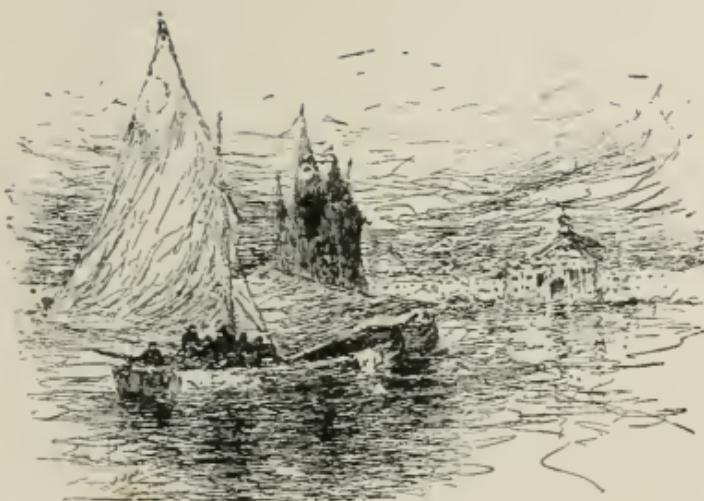


# ESPERO GORGONI, GONDOLIER

BY F. HOPKINSON SMITH

*With Illustrations by the Author*





Poor old Ingenio—my gondolier of five years before—dear old Ingenio, with his white hair and gentle voice; Ingenio with the little, crippled daughter and the sad-faced wife, who lived near the church behind the Rialto, had made his last crossing. At least the sacristan shook his head and pointed upward when I sought tidings

of him ; and the old, familiar door with the queer gratings was locked, and the windows cobwebbed and dust-begrimed.

None of the gondoliers at the Rialto landing knew, nor did any of the old men at the water-steps — the men with the hooked staffs who steady your boat while you alight. Five years was so very long ago, they said, and then there had been the plague.

So I looked up wistfully at the windows of the old palace where I had called to him so often—I can see him now, with little Giulietta in his arms, peering at me through the gay, climbing flowers which she watered so carefully—looked long and wistfully, as if he must surely answer back, "*Si, signore, immediatamente,*" and turned sadly away.

But then there was the same old gondola-landing, blue poles, bridge, and all, with its flock of gondolas hovering around, and a dozen lusty fellows ready to spring



to their oars and serve me night and day for a pittance that elsewhere a man would starve on. My lucky star once sent me Ingenio, who floating past caught my signal; why not another?

This is why I am on the quay near the Rialto this lovely morning, in Venice, overlooking the gondolas curving in and out, and watching the faces of the gondoliers as with uplifted hands, like a row of whips, they call out their respective numbers and qualifications.

In my experience there is nothing like a gondola to paint from, especially in the summer—and it is the summer time. Then all these Venetian cabs are gay in their sunshiny attire, and have laid aside their dark, hooded cloaks, their rainy-day mackintoshes—*their felsi*—and have pulled over their shoulders a frail awning of creamy white, with snowy draperies at sides and back, under which you paint in

state or lounge luxuriously, drinking in the beauty about you.

I have in my wanderings tried all sorts of moving studios: *tartanas* in Spain, *volantes* in Cuba, broad-sailed luggers in Holland, mules in Mexico, and cabs everywhere. One I remember with delight—an old night-hawk in Amsterdam—that offered me not only its front seat for my easel, its arm-rest for my water-bottle, and a pocket in the door-flap for brushes (I am likely to expect all these conveniences in even the most disreputable of cabs), but insisted on giving me the additional luxury of a knot-hole in its floor for waste water.

But with all this a cab is not a gondola.

In a gondola you are never shaken by the tired beast resting his other leg, nor by the small boy who looks in at the window, nor by the cabby, who falls asleep on the box and awakes periodically with a start that repeats a shiver through your

brush hand, and a corresponding wave-line across your sky.

In place of this there is only a cosey curtain-closed nest—a little boudoir with down cushions and silk fringes and soft morocco coverings, kept afloat by a long, lithe, swan-like, moving boat, black as an Inquisitor's gown save for the dainty awning; a something bearing itself proudly with head high in air—alive or still, alert or restful, and obedient to your lightest touch—half sea-gull revelling in the sunlight, half dolphin cutting the dark water.

If you are hurried, and the splash of the oar comes quick and strong, in an instant your gondola quivers with the excitement of the chase. You feel the thrill through its entire length as it strains every nerve; the touch of the oar, like the touch of the spur, urging it to its best. If you would rest, and so slip into some dark waterway under the shadow of overhanging balcony

or mouldy palace wall, your water-swallow becomes a very *lasagnone*, and will go sound asleep, and for hours, or loll lazily, the little waves lapping about its bow.

In Venice my gondola is always my home, and my gondolier always my best friend ; and so when my search for Ingénio ended only in a cobwebbed door and an abandoned balcony, and that mournful shake of the sacristan's head, and I stood scanning anxiously the upturned faces below me, it was some minutes before I selected his successor and returned Espero's signal.

I cannot say why I singled him out, except, perhaps, that he did not press forward with the rest, rushing his bow ahead ; but rather held back, giving his place to a gray-headed old gondolier, who in his haste had muffed his oar awkwardly, at which the others laughed.

Perhaps, too, it might have been his frank, handsome, young face, with its

merry, black eyes ; or the inviting look of the cushions beneath the white awning, with the bit of a rug on the floor ; or the picturesque effect of the whole ; or all of them together, that caught my eye. Or it might have been the perfect welding together of man and boat. For, as he stood erect in the sunlight, twisting the gondola with his oar, his loose shirt, with throat and chest bare in highest light against the dark water, his head bound with a red kerchief, his well-knit, graceful figure swaying in the movement of the whole, blending with and yet controlling it, both man and boat seemed but parts of one organism, a sort of marine Centaur, as free and fearless as that wonderful myth of the olden time. Whatever it was, my lucky star peeped out at the opportune moment, and the next instant my sketch-traps were tumbled in.

“ To the Salute ! ”

The gondolier threw himself on his oar,

the sensitive craft quivered at the touch, and we glided out upon the broad waters of the Grand Canal.

Nowhere else in the wide world is there such a sight. A double row of creamy white palaces tiled in red and topped with quaint chimneys. Overhanging balconies of marble, fringed with flowers, with gay awnings above and streaming shadows below. Two lines of narrow quays crowded with people flashing bright bits of color in the blazing sun. Swarms of gondolas, barcos, and lesser water-spiders darting in and out. Lazy red-sailed luggers, melon-loaded, with crinkled green shadows crawling beneath their bows; while at the far end over the glistening highway, beaded with people, curves the beautiful bridge—an ivory arch against a turquoise sky.

Espero ran the gauntlet of the skimming boats, dodging the little steamers puffing away all out of breath with their run from

the Lido, shot his boat into a narrow canal, and out again upon the broad water, until the edge of her steel blade touched the water-stairs of the Salute.

This beautiful church is always my rendezvous. It is half-way to everything: to the Public Garden; across the Giudecca; away over to the Lagoon where the fishermen live; to the Rialto and beyond.

In the freshness of the morning, when its lovely dome throws a cool shadow across its piazza, there is no better place for a painter to make up his mind as to where he would work. Mine required but a few minutes; I would paint near the Fondimenta della Pallada; a narrow, short canal where the fishermen moor their boats.

“What is your name, gondolier?”

“Espero Gorgoni.”

The voice was sweet and musical, and the answer was given with a turn of the head as graceful as it was free.



“ Do you know the Pallada ? ”

“ Perfectly.”

“ Stop, then, where the crab-baskets are moored to the poles.”

A turn of the wrist, a long, bending sweep of the oar across the Giudecca, and we enter a waterway leading to the Lagoon. Here live the fishermen, in great, rambling houses three and four stories high—warehouses probably in the old days—running sheer into the water.

Outside of the lower windows lie their boats, with gay-colored sails, and next to these stand a row of poles anchoring the huge wicker crab- and fish-baskets filled with their early morning catch.

Espero ran the gondola behind a protecting sail, and in five minutes I was at work.

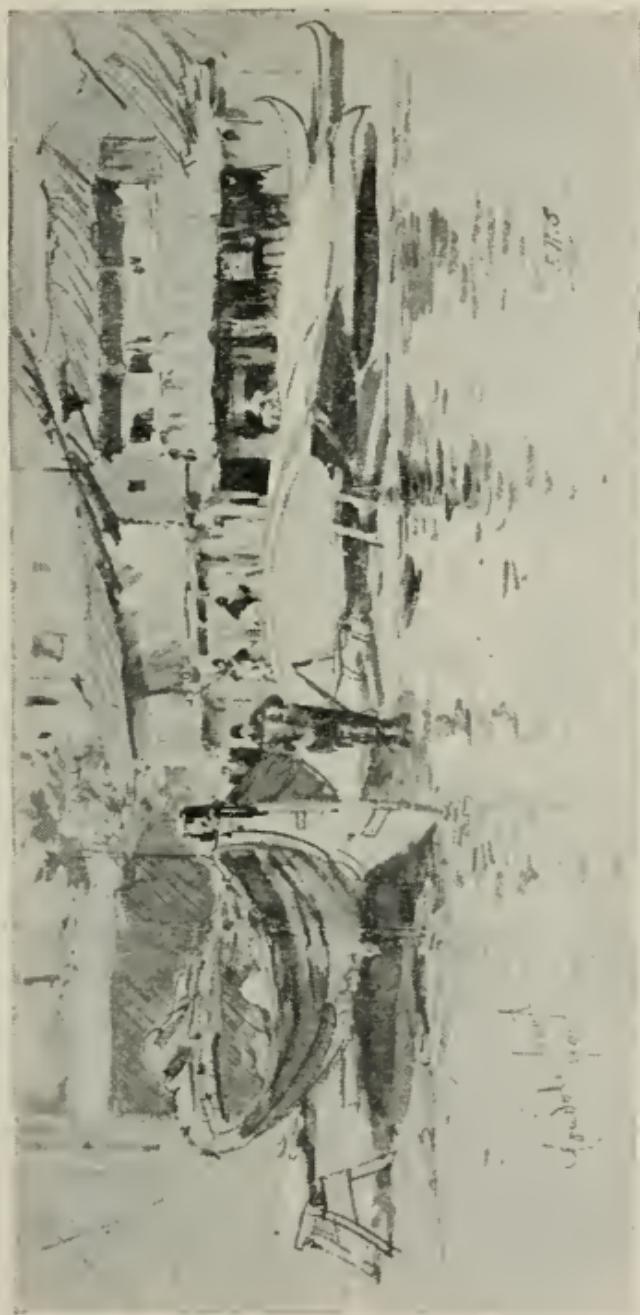
The experience was not new to him. I saw that from the way he opened the awning on the proper side, unstrapped my easel, and spread out the contents of my trap on the cushions, which he reversed to protect from waste water; and from the way he stepped ashore, so that my gondola should lie perfectly still, joining later a group of children who were watching me from the doorway above. (Half an hour after they were laughing at his stories, the two youngest in his lap. A considerate, good-natured fellow, I thought, this gondolier of mine, and fond of children; and I kept at work.

When the fisherman awoke and came down to make ready his boat for the morning, and I began the customary protest about the lowering of the sail, thus spoiling my sketch, Espero sprang up, locked his arm through that of the intruder, and led him gently back into the house, calling to me, five minutes thereafter, from across the canal, to keep at work and not to hurry, as the fisherman and he would have a mouthful of wine together. And a man of tact, too! Really, if my gondolier develops like this, I shall not miss Ingenio so much.

The next day we were across the Lagoon, and the day following up the Giudecca, by the storehouses where the lighters unload, and before the week was out I had fallen into my old habits and was sharing my breakfast and my cigarette-case with my gondolier, who, day by day, won his way by some new trait of usefulness or some new charm of manner.

Oh, these breakfasts in the gondola in the early morning ; the soft, fresh air of the sea in your face, the cool splash of the water in your ears ! On the floor of the boat, smoking hot, rests the little copper coffee-pot ; above in the wooden side-pockets, your store of fruit and rolls. With what a waste and recklessness is the melon split and quartered, and the half-eaten crescents thrown overboard ! What savory fish ! What delicious bread ! What luscious figs ! And yet Espero had gathered them all up at a caffè, a fruit-stand, and a baker's ; and a bit of silver no larger than my thumb-nail had paid for it all.

When the wind freshens and the boats from Chioggia begin spreading their sails, Espero turns his prow toward the Public Garden — their mooring-ground — and we follow them out over the broad water until my sketch-book is filled with their varying



forms and colors. On our way back we board the wood boats, drifting in with the tide, or land under the old garden-walls, which Espero scales, regaining the gondola loaded with flowers, which he festoons over the awning, trailing the blossoming vines in the water behind. Or we circle about the Salute, composing it now on the right, with some lighter boats in the distance; now on the left, with the Dogana and the stretch of palaces beyond. Or we haunt the churches, listening to the music, or follow with our eyes the slender, graceful Venetians who come and go.

In all these rambles there was one little, crooked canal near the Salute that, whatever our course, Espero always dodged into. Long way around or short way over, it was always the same. Somehow Espero must get into this waterway to get out somewhere else. At last I caught him. She wore a yellow silk handkerchief tied

under her pretty chin and was waving her hand from a balcony filled with oleanders high up on the wall of a crumbling old palace. These were our days!

Then came the twilights, with palace, tower, and dome purple in the fading light, the canal all molten gold, the gondolas, with lamps alight, gliding like fireflies.

On one of these purple-laden twilights we had floated over to San Giorgio, moored the gondola to a great iron ring in the water-soaked steps that might once have held a slave-laden galley, and had sat down to watch the darkness as it slowly settled over the dreaming city. Away off to the right stood the Campanile, its cone-shaped top pink and gold, while behind, against the deepening blue, rose its twin tower.

The scene awoke all the old memories, and I began talking to Espero, who was stretched out on the marble steps below

me, of the olden times when this same harbor was full of ships of every clime, with sails of gold and cargoes of spice, and of the great regattas, and the two-decked war barges, with slaves double-banked rowing beneath; and from this to the wonderful *Bucentaur*, the Doge's barge, encrusted with gold, rowed by the members of the *Arsenalotti*—a sort of guild or corporation formed of the workmen at the Arsenal. How, every year, occurred the ceremony of the *Espousal* of the Adriatic, and how, when the *Bucentaur* returned, there was a grand banquet, at which the *Arsenalotti* dined at the public expense, with the privilege of carrying off everything on the table—even the linen, vessels, and glass.

Espero's attitude and face, as he listened, led me on. He had an odd way of lifting his eyebrows quickly when I told him something that interested him—a questioning, yet deferential expression,

which I generally accepted as a tribute to my superior intelligence. He never formulated it in words. It was only one of the many flashes that swept over his face, but it was always a grateful encouragement.

And so, with the glamour of the scene about me, and with Espero's eyes fastened on mine, his well-shaped head clear cut against the fading sky, I rambled on, telling him of those things I thought would please him the most. Of how these Arsenalotti became gondoliers, joining the Castellani—the gondoliers at that time being divided into two parties, the Castellani, who wore red hoods, and the Nicolletti, who wore black hoods. Of how these Castellani were aristocrats and had portioned out to them the eastern part of the city where the Doge lived, his residence being in the Piazza of San Marco; while the Nicolletti were only publicans. That, besides attending to the Doge in

public, many of these Castellani had served him in private, thus being of great service to the state.

Espero listened to every word, raising his head and looking at me curiously when I mentioned the Castellani, and laughing outright at my description of the banquet tables in the hands of the Arsenalotti. Nothing else dropped from his lips except the grim remark that if he had lived in those days he would, perhaps, have owned his own gondola, and not have had to use his grandfather's, who was now too old to row. I remembered afterward that a certain thoughtful expression overspread his face, as if my talk had awakened some memory of his own.

A passing music-boat cut short my dissertation, and in a moment more we were following in its wake, threading our way in and out of the tangle of gondolas massed about it. Then a twist of the oar, and Espero glided alongside the lantern-

hung barge and leaned over to speak to the leader. The musicians were going to the Piazza, would I care to hear them sing under the Bridge of Sighs ?

In five minutes we had picked our way through the labyrinth of surrounding gondolas, and in five more had entered the close, narrow canal, where the beautiful bridge, buttressed by two great masses of gloom—the palace and the prison—overhung the sluggish, sullen water.

There is never a lantern now along this weird and grawsome waterway. One only sees the twinkling lamps of the gondolas, like will-o'-the-wisps, drift past—the boats themselves lost in the blackness of the shadows—the glimmer of the pale light of some slow-moving barge, or the reflection of the stars above. All else is dark and ghostly.

The music-boat drifted sideways, and the bass-viol, who was standing, twisted a light cord through an iron ring in the

slimy, ooze-colored palace. Espero drifted against the opposite wall—the prison.

“ What shall they sing, signor? ”

“ As you please, Espero.”

I have heard the *Miserere* chanted at dead of night in the streets of an old Italian town, the flare of the torches lighting the upturned face of the ghastly dead ; my eyes have filled when, with knee to marble floor, I have listened to the pathos of its harmonies sighing through the many-pillared mosque of Cordova ; I have drunk in its cadences in curtained alcoves with the breath of waving fans and flash of gems about me ; but never has its grandeur and majesty so stirred my imagination and entranced my soul as on this night in Venice, under the deep blue of the soft Italian sky, the frowning, blood-stained palace above, the treacherous silent water beneath.

I could stretch out my hand and touch the very stones that had confined the liv-

ing dead. I could look down into the same depths along the edge of the water-soaked marble where had lain the headless body, with sack and cord, awaiting the sure current of the changing tide; and from my cushions in the listing gondola I could see, high up against the blue in the starlight, the same narrow window in the fatal arch, through which the hopeless had caught a last glimpse of light and life.

When the last low strains had died away, Espero raised himself erect, walked slowly the length of the gondola, and, bending down, said in a voice tremulous with emotion: "Signor, did you hear the tramp of the poor fellows over the bridge, and the moans of the men dying under the wall? Holy God! Was it not terrible?"

At that instant the barge floated past. I looked at him in wonder—Espero's eyes were full of tears!

This man began to interest me intensely. Only an every-day, plain, Venetian gondolier, in a blue shirt, and patched at that, with hardly a franc he could call his own, and yet there was something about him that made his presence a delight. It was not the graceful swing of his beautiful body, nor his musical laugh, nor his honest kindness to every human being. It was rather an undefined, courteous, well-bred independence.

When it came to rowing a gondola, it never seemed to me that he rowed because it was his duty and his livelihood. He rowed because he loved it, and because he loved the sunshine across his face and the flash of the water on his oar-blade—the swing and freedom of it all. My happening to be a passenger was but one of those necessary evils attending the earning and payment of five francs a day. And yet, not altogether an evil; for he loved me, too, as he did everything else

that brought him companionship and air and light and life.

Nothing seemed to tire him. Day or night, or all night, if I wished it—for often we were whole nights together in the soft summer air, floating back to the sleeping city in the gray dawn, stopping to listen to early mass at the Pieta, or following the fruit-boats or fishermen in from the Lido.

And thus it was that we ransacked Venice from San Giorgio to Murano; and thus it was that every day I caught some fresh glimpse of the sweetness of his inner nature, and every day loved him the better. Nobody could have helped it. There was that touch about him one could not resist. Once on the Giudecca, when the sea was polished steel and the tide turning ebb, Espero ran the gondola up under the lee of a melon-boat, its sail limp and useless in the breathless air, sprang over her rail, caught the oar from the captain, fagged out with the long pull

from the Lido, and threw his weight against the drooping blade. And all this with a laugh and a twist of his foot in pirouette, as if it was the merriest fun in the world to save a tide and a market for a man he had never seen in his life before.

On another morning he was just in time to save Beppo from a plunge overboard—old Beppo who for centuries (nobody knows how old Beppo is) has hooked his staff into myraids of gondolas landing at the Salute steps. It had happened that some other mediæval ruin, a few years Beppo's junior, had crowded the old man from his place, and Espero's righteous wrath was not appeased until he had driven the usurper from the piazza of the church, with the parting reminder that he would break every bone in his withered old skin if he ever caught him there again.

And yet, with all my opportunities for

intimacy, I really got no nearer to the inner side of Espero than the day I hired him. To him I was still only the painter from over the sea, his patron, to whom he was loyal, good-natured, happy-hearted, and obliging; but nothing more. Nothing more was for sale for five francs a day. What his home or life might be outside the hours I called my own, I knew no more than of the hundred other gondoliers who filled the canal with their cries and their laughter. The one sole connecting link was the pretty Venetian of the little, crooked canal, who waved her hand whenever we passed, and who once tossed down a spray of oleander which fell at his feet; and yet I could not even have found her doorway, much less have told her name.

One beautiful, bright Sunday morning, perplexed at this unequal exchange of confidences, this idea took possession of me. Espero and I would breakfast to-

gether—blue shirt, patch, and all! Not as we had often breakfasted before, in the gondola under the shadow of a palace, or down by the stalls of the fruit-market; but



at the great Caffè Florian, in the Piazza of San Marco, at twelve o'clock high noon, in the midst of gold embroidered officers with clanking swords and waxed mustaches, and ladies of high degree in dainty gowns and veils.

"Leave the gondola, Espero, in charge of somebody, and come with me!"

We twisted our way through the narrow slits of streets, choked with awnings shading groups of Venetians sipping their coffee, dodged under an archway, across a narrow bridge, and so out upon the blinding, baking Piazza, dotted here and there with hurrying figures, dogged by ink-spilled shadows.

"Breakfast for two!" I said to the startled waiter. "Take the seat by the window, Espero!"

His face lighted up, and an expression of the greatest happiness and good humor overspread it. But that was all. There was no sign of humility; nothing indicating that I had done him a kindness or had conferred upon him any special favor. He merely pointed to himself, and then to the seat, as if making quite sure, saying, "Me, signor?" and then sat himself down, spreading his napkin, and all with the air

of a man accustomed to that sort of thing every day of his life.

I ordered nearly everything on the bill of fare—fish, eggs, salad, broiled cutlet, fruit, even a bottle of Chianti, with silk tassels on its neck. *Espero* took each in its course with the easy grace of a Chesterfield and the quiet refinement of a man of the world.

The only person who put his astonishment into words was the head waiter, who caught his breath when I lighted *Espero*'s cigarette myself, recounting to his assistant, and adding, "*Ma foi*, what funny people these painters!"

An hour later we were again afloat, embarking at the water-steps of the Piazza.

Just here, and for the first time in all our intercourse, I noticed a change in *Espero*'s bearing. The touch of humility—it had been only a trace, and, as I always knew, only assumed that I might

see he recognized the obligation of five francs—even that slight touch was gone.

The change was not one that betokened presuming familiarity, as if all social barriers having now been swept away he would insist upon sharing with me everything I owned. It was more the manner of a man clothed with the responsibilities of a host ; a welcoming, generous, appropriating manner. Heretofore, when I had stepped into the gondola, Espero invariably offered me his bent elbow to steady myself ; but now he gave me his hand.

Furthermore, he did not wait for instructions as to where the prow of the gondola should be pointed. He said, instead :

“ There is a famous old Cortile that I must show you. All the artists paint it. We will go now ! ”

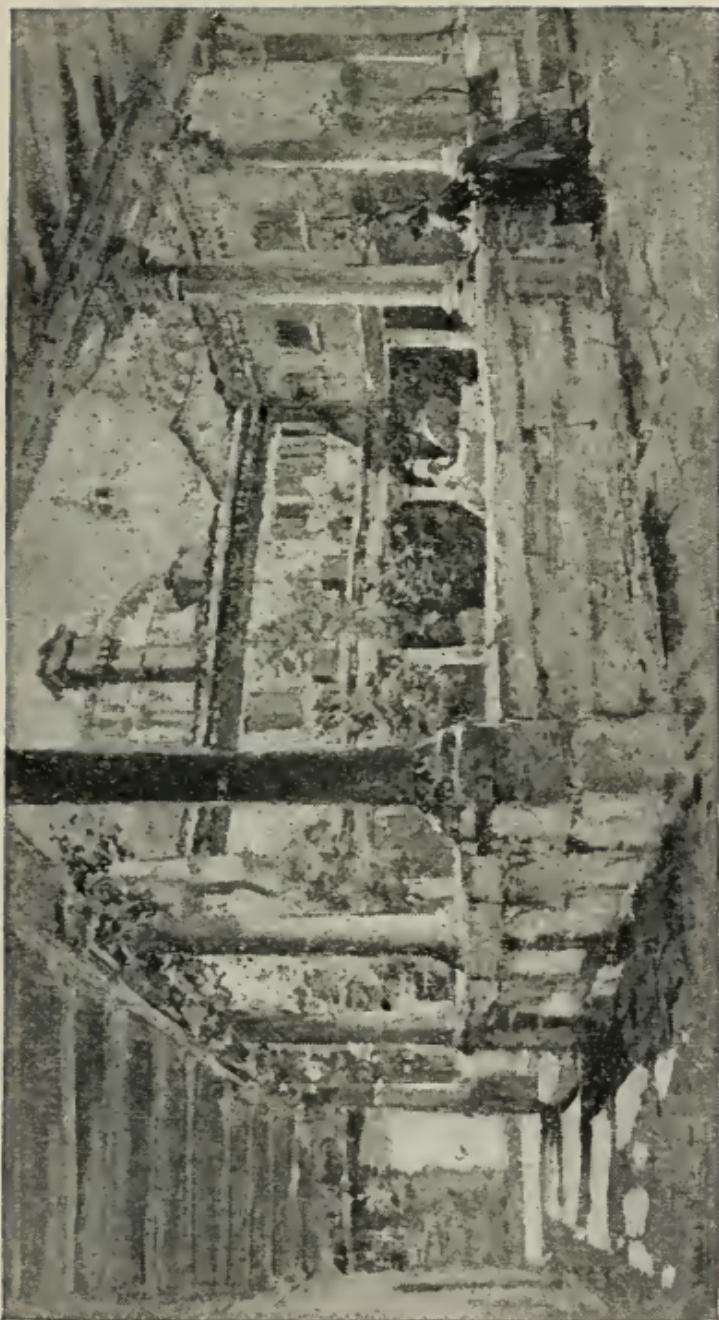
With this he shot past our customary landing-place, entered the little, crooked

canal, and rounded the gondola in front of an old marble archway curiously carved.

I began to wonder at the change that had come over him. What was there about this Cortile? If everybody had painted it, why should he have kept it hidden all summer from me?

Espero's manner at this landing was, if anything, more expressive than at the last; for, after securing the gondola, he waved his hand graciously and led me along a damp, tunnel-like passage, until we stepped into an abandoned cloister, once the most beautiful Cortile in Venice.

When we entered the sun was blazing against the opposite wall, the nearer columns standing out strong and dark. In the square, bounded by the low wall supporting the pillars, which in turn supported the living-rooms above, climbing vines and grasses ran riot, while in the centre of the tangled mass of weeds stood an old



covered well, at which a girl was filling her copper water-pail.

Espero watched my delight at its picturesqueness, laughing outright at my determination to begin work at once, and then, with great deference, led me to a doorway level with the flagging of the mouldy pavement. Here he rang a bell hung on the outside. The next instant a shutter opened above and a pair of black eyes peered out from between some pots of oleanders. It was the same face I had seen so often smiling at Espero from an upper balcony. The cloister evidently abutted on the little, crooked canal. This, then, was what he was hiding! But surely he could not have thought that I would have stolen his sweetheart!

Another moment and the door was opened by the same pretty Venetian, who ushered us into a square hall having a broad staircase which led to the floor above. Here, on the wainscoted walls,

half-way to the ceiling, hung a collection of old portraits, each one a delight to the eye of a painter. They were of men, costumed in the time of the later Doges—one in scarlet and black, another in a robe of deep blue, while a third wore a semi-military uniform and carried a short sword.

They all had one distinguishing feature: each head was covered by a bright red hood.

Espero never took his eyes from my face as I looked about me in astonishment, not even long enough to salute the pretty Venetian who stood smiling at his side.

“Who lives here, Espero?”

“My grandfather, signor, who is very old, lives on this floor. My little wife, Mariana,” turning to the pretty Venetian, “and I live on the floor above;” and he kissed the girl on the forehead and laid her hand in mine.

“And these portraits——”

“Are some of the famous gondoliers of

old. This one was chief of the Arsenalotti, and an intimate friend of the Doge."

"And the others?"

Espero's eyes twinkled, and a quizzical, half-triumphant smile broke over his face.

"These are all my ancestors, signor. We have been gondoliers for two hundred years. I am a Castellani!"

# THE ANATOMIST OF THE HEART

BY T. R. SULLIVAN

*With Illustrations by Albert Lynch*



Thou, stubborn heart, thyself hast willed it so !  
Happy wouldest thou be, forever happy,  
Or forever desolate, stubborn heart,  
And desolate thou art now.

HEINE.

AN hour after sundown on a summer evening, when the last note of the second *Ave Maria*, called, of the dead, has died away, there is commonly no quieter and more unfrequented quarter in all Venice than the long reach of the Grand Canal between the Rialto Bridge and the Palazzo Foscari. Now and then the lantern of some solitary gondola skims noiselessly over its dark surface like a luminous water-fly. But the business of the day has ceased, and the great barges of traffic are tied up for the night ; the lines of palace-front with their clustered arches and splen-

dors of carving that shine out as miracles in the daytime now look frowningly, blending all beauty of detail in uniform blackness. No hospitable light steals through their closed shutters ; for the owners are



all absent, each under his vine and fig-tree among the mountains of the mainland. The stranger seeking pleasure is drawn for it in other directions—to the music on the Piazza or at the gate of the royal palace. Nothing can be found here but night and the stars and the peculiarly de-

pressing solitude of a deserted thoroughfare.

On rare occasions, however, the Municipality undertakes to change all this for the pleasure of the people. The simple contrivance that effects the transformation is unknown outside of Venice, for the conditions existing there and there only are essential to its success. An illuminated raft with a military band upon it is drawn slowly down through all these solemn precincts and beyond them, by the great portico of the Salute Church and the fickle Fortuna who turns her face toward every breeze that blows, to the point where the Canal Grande widens out into the lagoon. Around the raft as it moves downward many gondolas gather like a flock of seabirds in a steamer's wake disputing for places, losing and regaining them, while the music plays, and one after another the ancient houses light up with colored fires. Nature and the arts combine thus to give

this *fresco*, as it is fitly named, a never-failing charm that defies description. One who knows the background may easily supply the rest for himself, yet the liveliest imagination, fortified by all augmentatives and superlatives known to the Italian tongue, if bent upon recording the scene would do it scanty justice.

The first *fresco* of the season had been announced for the night of the *Festa Nazionale*, early in June.\* The rosy tints of sunset faded from a cloudless sky, and as the gray twilight drew on all was bustle and expectation around the huge archway of the Rialto. Overhead, an eager throng lined the parapet, and at the café below red wine flickered in a hundred glasses. All the tables were full, even to the water's edge, the amiable, chattering crowd being made up as usual of both sexes, young and old together. The joys of domestic life are nowhere more apparent than in Venice, where so much of it passes out of

doors. When the day's work is done, whole families clasp hands to plunge into the black water of some side canal; the father, with a lantern on his head, smiles up from the incoming tide as you glide by him, and bids you observe how well his boy, who is hardly old enough to walk, has learned to swim; in sea or on shore, his wife and children share his recreation, even though he turns night into day to accomplish it. With a feast going on in the quarter, bedtime may come for the maimed, the halt, and the blind, but not for them.

Just out of all this merry confusion a private gondola, comfortably appointed, drew up under the wall near the *café-landing*. Both gondolier and passenger had evidently played at this game before, and knew that there was no better place to await the beginning of the sport. The former, a handsome fellow in livery, with one gold ear-ring, went forward to light

his lamp, and his master, settling himself a little more luxuriously upon the cushions, puffed his cigar with the air of a man who has time at his command and can afford to waste it. His keen, thoughtful glance showed a certain interest in all the little details upon which it rested ; he had eyes for the golden lances of light shooting deep into the water, as well as for the stout waiter laden with wicker-covered wine-flasks and perplexed by many contrary commands. He even looked so good-humoredly at a small plebeian just above him, that the child laughed, and kissed its chubby hand. The mother would have hushed it, but at sight of the stranger's friendly expression refrained from doing so. Just then, the boat moved on a yard or two, carrying him out of range ; he smiled as he passed, and tossed a coin into the child's lap. "An Englishman !" whispered the woman, pointing him out to her husband, who, after a look, whispered

back: "*Troppo gentile!* I think he is American."

An American he was, and on many accounts one to be envied. He had health, good looks, varied intellectual resources, an ample fortune; and he was still at an age to reap the benefit of these advantages. He had creative talent, too, in one direction, with sufficient ambition to develop it. Fortunately, perhaps, his wealth, chiefly inherited, came somewhat late, when his habits of application were confirmed; otherwise, he might have remained a mere dilettante in his chosen pursuit, which was that of a novelist. Now, his art had become second nature to him, and from the first his aim had been a high one; to do well was not enough, he must do better if he would please himself. He had the satisfaction of knowing that this strong endeavor did not go unrecognized. The name of Malcolm Powell, if not yet ranked among the great

ones, already commanded attention in both hemispheres. One small book of his had been translated into many languages. Even here, where modern art in all its branches has but a meagre following, the Italian version of this story was displayed in a dealer's window. As it happened, the work so honored was not the last that he had published. The best judges maintained more or less openly that a later book, while undeniably clever, nevertheless fell somewhat short of his own standard ; and he, when the fever of its production subsided, found himself reluctantly inclining to the same belief. He determined, therefore, to take a longer rest than usual, and to store up new impressions. He was a bachelor of forty, without ties, singularly alone in the world ; so he went out into it, locking his door one fine spring morning for an indefinite stay abroad. Italy had been a delight to him in earlier days, and from

the wear and tear of the London season he fled southward over the St. Gotthard to Lugano, where the clear air and the Arcadian peacefulness of the lake-shore almost tempted him to write again. But he was not ready for this, and going on to Venice found precisely what he needed —entire freedom from social obligations, yet interests enough to keep his mind employed for days together. Establishing himself, therefore, in a quiet lodging on the Riva, remote from the strangers' quarter, he began to study churches and pictures, to explore old libraries in which he was the only reader, to note with an artist's enthusiasm all lights and shades, all strange manners and customs of the life around him. The loneliness that to another might have been disheartening, to him had not yet suggested itself. Schemes for future work went with him everywhere, and, for the time being, he demanded nothing better in the way of companionship.

There was a momentary hush when the raft, towed by a small steamer, came in sight above the bridge; then, while it swung slowly into position, the noise redoubled with every form of excited comment. The wooden framework was masked by rows of lamps in red, white, and green—the national colors; its central lights were arranged in the form of a palm-tree with wide-spreading branches, which by some hidden mechanism grew in height as it cleared the arch, hundreds of gleaming pendants making all the space where the musicians stood below as bright as day. The band struck up a march, and at this signal a flaming star flashed out upon the *café*-wall. The *fresco* had begun, and while the raft moved ponderously forward, all the smaller craft afloat, amid much splashing and shouting and angry gesticulation, prepared to follow.

The practised hand of Powell's gondo-

lier quietly overcame all obstacles; so that before long the American found himself in the very heart of the throng and moving on with it, now swiftly, now at a snail's pace, according to the circumstances of the moment. A few yards in advance loomed up the glittering palm-tree, and all around him through the shadow black hulls of other gondolas swayed in an undulating mass from shore to shore. It amused Powell to watch the occupants, natives for the most part, as they hailed their acquaintances or compared notes with them during the pauses of the music. Owing to pressure from without, that could neither be foreseen nor controlled, his nearest neighbors were continually changing. A talkative family party gave place to an officer, who, pulling the straw from his long Virginia, begged a light for it; then lifted his hat gravely and was gone, to be succeeded by a group of Americans, one of whom

flourished the national standard in little. Powell did not know these people, yet nevertheless was inexpressibly relieved when they passed on in their turn; for they were of the helpless sort, and with any suspicion of his nationality would surely have appealed to him for advice or explanation. But some word of theirs had set him thinking. With a sigh he dropped his cigar into the water, and yielding to the untimely thought, drifted away into the past, lost for a while to all consciousness of the agreeable present by which he was surrounded.

A slight shock recalled him. The raft had stopped suddenly before the Municipal Palace for a serenade in honor of the City Fathers, and Powell's gondola had bumped into one just in front of it. No harm was done; the gondoliers were not even stirred into the usual recriminations. But this trifling accident served to rouse Powell from his reverie. He looked



up at the palace windows, all ablaze with light, and seeing no figure of interest in the official group, he idly resumed his study of the crowd below.

They had reached the wider part of the canal; there was greater freedom of movement, and everywhere he found new faces. As the obstructing gondola came slowly backward abreast of his own, Powell saw that the boatman wore mourning livery, and that the boat was carved and

gilded. A graceful woman, with black lace about her head and shoulders, reclined in it alone. Powell waited eagerly to see what she was like, and leaning forward as she drew nearer, attracted her attention. She turned, their eyes met, and each gave a start of recognition.

“ Marchesa ! ”

“ Signor Max ! ”

Smiling, she held out her hand, which he grasped warmly. “ Who would have thought to find the Marchesa Del Riso here in June ! ”

“ Who would have imagined the distinguished Signor Powell to be in Italy ! ” she answered in English which the friend thus graciously designated thought was no worse for a musical intonation that did not properly belong to it. “ And alone —that is very sad and gloomy,” she continued lightly. “ Pray accept my hospitality, and take this seat—unless you have better plans.”

"None equal to the pleasure of being literally in the same boat with you," said Powell, laughing, as he stepped from his gondola into hers.

"Ah!" she replied, "if we are to flatter each other I shall score two points to your one; you have grown so great since our last meeting, while I——"

"You are unchanged."

"Thank you. This light is most becoming to me. You forget how time has flown."

"Ten years, it must be—though that is hard to believe."

"I knew you had forgotten. It is twelve years and a half."

"The years and months are details," he returned. "And I have the best of excuses now for losing sight of them. See how well I can remember the important things. We were in Rome at the Palazzo Altieri. The Marchese did not come, and we sat alone together in a corner of the ball-room under the musicians'

gallery. I was to go the next morning, and you gave me your farewells. You wished me success in art, success in love. I answered that you desired too much, that the two rarely associate themselves in one man's life. But you doubted it, and persisted in wishing for me the improbable, if not the impossible."

" Well ? "

" Well, I am still between the two fires — both as far away as those stars are, and as little likely to be attained."

His companion laughed gently. " You Americans are strange creatures. It is not enough to be great, you must always rule the spheres."

" What do you mean ? "

" You are an excellent example of what I mean. As to the art, for instance, men have struggled all their lives to do what you have done already. As to the love, *ci vuol pazienza, amico mio !* Your life is not yet over."

There was a little pause, during which Powell sighed gloomily. Then he picked up one of her long black gloves which had fallen to the floor of the gondola, and said : " I am tired of myself. Let us talk of something else. You are well, I know, but—"

" My husband died more than a year ago," she explained, drawing away the glove.

" I beg your pardon—I did not understand—"

" Hush ! " said she. " We must listen to the music. It is ' Aïda,'—*Come scordar potrem !*"

She leaned forward with an air of rapt attention. They were drifting close under the terrace of one of the large hotels on the lower canal ; the glare from its windows enabled Powell to see her as distinctly as though the sun had shone, and what he saw surprised him. Reckoned by the details of years and months, her

age exceeded his; of that he was perfectly sure. She had made no attempt at concealment; there were gray hairs upon her temples; but, in spite of these, in spite of dates and calendars, she had held her own wonderfully well. Instead of a faded beauty standing in need of the adroit compliment he had paid instinctively, the charm that gave her name in earlier days a Continental reputation remained unimpaired. By one of those inadvertences in which time delights, this woman was still young, still beautiful. His compliment had been no compliment at all.

So she was a widow at last, without the smallest pretence of being inconsolable. *Come scordar potrem!* As the music rose and fell, all the story of her marriage flashed back into Powell's mind. There had been little romance about it. She was the daughter of a rich merchant who had left no other child, and with her mother's

help she had frankly exchanged her riches for a title. The old marchese was a brute, it was said, neglecting her, treating her abominably. If this were true the report lacked confirmation by any sign of hers. No breath of scandal had ever blurred her name. She had fulfilled to the letter her share of the bargain, walking erect, uncomplaining, with a smile, as the Marchesa del Riso should. But, that she had never for one moment loved the man who ennobled her, Powell knew by the best of evidence—her own. On that last night in Rome, moved by some impulse unexplained, she had confided so much of her painful secret to the young American. There are moments when the proudest woman will reveal such things, and Powell fancied that her choice of a confidant had no direct significance, but that she had told the tale merely as a matter of relief, as she might have whispered it to a stock or a stone, or any inanimate object. He

was on the eve of departure, in all probability about to disappear forever beyond her horizon's rim. His presence would never serve to remind her of the indiscretion. Telling him was practically telling nobody, the appeal for pity being made to one powerless to work her either good or ill. Nevertheless, it was an appeal for pity, and with the usual perversity of mankind, Powell had blamed her for it. Her attitude toward the world wore a becoming dignity that he admired greatly, all the while suspecting the truth which he would have preferred not to learn from her lips. The discovery that she was a little less a Spartan than he imagined proved distasteful to him. He still admired her, but with a difference. So far as he was concerned, she had suffered a distinct loss by her confession.

She had it all now—the title, the freedom which must have figured in her calculation as sure to come sooner or later,

which had come in good time. The disturbing influence was dispelled, the long anguish of it already dead and buried. As she turned to Powell with the old sweet smile, it was not surprising that he forgot to blame her, that he thought himself extremely fortunate in this chance encounter, that he began to wonder what her plans were, whether or not she had a house in Venice, how long she was likely to remain here in this dull season. But letting these subjects wait to unfold themselves naturally, he asked no questions, talking, instead, of the music, the other sounds and sights peculiar to the festa, the incomparable beauty of the scene before them. So they reached at last the broad lagoon, where the palm-tree was lowered and extinguished, the band put up its instruments, and all the crowd dispersed. Below them, dazzling reflections from the branching Piazzetta lights made the water look as though gold were steeped in it. Above

rose the Ducal Palace like some fabric of cloud in which the sunset after-glow still lingers; but night—deep, starry night—had long since settled down upon the domes of San Marco; all their splendors were put out; the prancing horses, the pillared saint and lion were lost in the same shadow that obliterated the mosaics and the marbles. Church and palace, court and cloister and arcade lay muffled in the darkness. Only the golden angel on the summit of the Campanile seemed to watch, gleaming high over all like a heavenly guard.

The bronze giants of the clock-tower struck the bell with their heavy hammers. "Cinderella's hour!" said the Marchesa. "I must go home."

"But not like Cinderella, I hope," suggested Powell. "Let me leave you at your door, and learn the way to it. My man will follow us to bring me back again."

"So much the better," she agreed.  
*"Alla casa, Matteo!"*

They turned in by the great wall of the council-chamber, which is hardly less gloomy than that of the prison opposite, passing under the Bridge of Sighs and the lesser bridges beyond it; then bore off sharply to the left, to the right, to the left again in an intricate course that even by day would have been bewildering. The darkness became oppressive. At every turn the canals grew narrower and more obscure, the bridge-arches lower; nearing one of these Powell bowed his head with instinctive precaution that provoked his companion to mockery.

"Courage, Signor," said she. "You forget the gondoliers' motto: 'Where the prow goes, all the rest goes too.' Look! Ours has nearly a foot to spare."

"I thought I knew my Venice," he pleaded, in excuse. "But this is unknown ground, or rather unknown water. I am

curious to see at what landmark we shall emerge."

He had no sooner spoken than they shot out into the Grand Canal, at a familiar point, and crossing it plunged on through other and darker by-ways.

"My house is not down in the books," she replied to his wondering glance. "I live in a Venice the stranger never learns. It is an old inheritance of my husband's, rarely opened in his life-time—still more rarely now. This is the garden," she added, as they followed a high, crumbling wall of mouldy brick behind which tall tree-tops rustled. "And here is the landing. You will come again, will you not? To-morrow, I hope. Ask for the Palazzo del Riso in the Tolentini quarter. Every child knows it."

A door swung open, showing him a dimly lighted courtyard with a stone staircase, up which she passed into the darkness. Under a lower arch her gondolier slipped

away, leaving room for his own ; to turn would have been impossible otherwise, since the canal was very narrow. All its other buildings were dingy and squalid, but Powell could see that this grim front, though all awry, had stone mouldings and capitals of a very early period.

" Do you know this house, Antonio ? " he asked, as they pushed off.

" Hoh ! *Per Bacco !* Who does not ? " answered the cheery Venetian, glad to break his long silence. " But the Signor has good luck. I have never seen the palace open that I remember. It is old—very old."

When the Signor returned the next day, as, of course, he was in duty bound to do, the melancholy charm of the place captivated him at once. Weeds grew in the crevices of the courtyard pavement ; its well-curb was mutilated and moss-grown ; the splendid railing of the staircase too had lost a bit here and there. But all was

dignified without and stately within. The long rooms through which he was ushered had an air of rigid order inconsistent with the usages of daily life. In themselves they were high and beautiful, but their too evident abandonment made them gloomy even with the afternoon sunlight flickering over the vines at the windows. In the last room, which showed more signs of occupancy than the rest, there rose to greet Powell a short, elderly woman whom he recognized as the Signora Carrera, the mother of his friend. She had a weak, insipid face, very unlike her daughter's, and Powell, believing that she was much to blame for the ill-advised marriage, had never fancied her. The unfavorable impression reasserted itself in spite of the cordial welcome she gave him.

"Placida will be here in a moment," she stated. "We hoped that you would come."

Placida—Placida del Riso! Powell re-

membered perfectly how upon hearing that name for the first time in the by-gone days he had repeated it to himself, and had decided that the Italian names were the most musical in the world.

There were books upon the table, and among them Powell noticed that best-known work of his in its Italian version. It was a new copy, freshly cut, with the paper-knife still lying between the leaves. Powell smiled at the thought that the Marchesa, anticipating his coming, had probably procured it that very morning under the arcade of the Piazza. At the sound of a closing door he looked up and saw her drawing nearer through the long vista of the rooms—drawing nearer, yet for a moment the odd fancy struck him that she was really going farther and farther away. Perhaps it was due to her mother, whose idle speech he was following mechanically, that the old admiration became suddenly darkened by the old disapproval. For his

sake the Marchesa had tried to look her best; of that there could be no doubt, and it was amazing to see how like her former self that best remained. In another moment she stood before him, smiling; she was content to see him—very content, she said. The working of his mind, could she have seen that, would hardly have contented her. “You are very charming, but—” was the unfinished thought there, as he returned her smile and the warm pressure of her hand.

He was urged to smoke, both women lighting their cigarettes too, as a matter of course; then their talk in the next few moments wandered from one subject to another somewhat vaguely, and under it the Marchesa grew visibly restless. When there came a pause, Powell, who had begun by admiring the house, revived that theme for want of something better; thereupon rising instantly, the Marchesa asked him if he would like to see more of it. He

assented eagerly, and was accordingly led by an inner door through a marble corridor to the ball-room—a wonder in its way, with a frieze by the younger Palma and a brilliant ceiling by some later hand ; the prevailing yellow tint of cornice, tapestries, and hangings relieved this room from the air of melancholy pervading the rest of the *piano nobile*. Only the guests were wanting to make it cheerfulness itself. They went on into an ante-chamber, darkened and gloomy, passing thence to the private chapel, radiant with a small but very lovely Madonna of Bellini. Here the window stood open, and the breeze brought in a delicious fragrance of honeysuckles and oleanders. Looking back, Powell perceived that the Signora Carrera had not followed them.

“ Let us go down into the garden,” said he.

So by a narrow passage and a winding staircase in the wall they descended to

trim paths and sunny stretches of lawn with flower-borders, tended by an old gardener who lifted his hat as they passed. All here was in good order, maintained, as the Marchesa said, chiefly for the benefit of the public, to whom right of entrance was granted once a week.

"Such a garden is rare in Venice," she concluded.

"And elsewhere too; one might look long to find a lovelier spot than this," said Powell, as crossing a rustic bridge overgrown with ivy they came into a grove of beeches where art had permitted nature to take the upper hand. The tall trunks were green with moss, and the ground on either side was a bed of ferns. A sharp turn of the path brought them to the basin of a fountain with lilies blossoming in its quiet water under a marble Cupid from whose quiver shot up a shower of spray. Behind this figure the leaves and branches had been cut away;

so that Powell suddenly found himself looking beyond the garden, beyond Venice, beyond the world, straight out at the western sky across the distant Euganean hills. The lagoon, scarcely ruffled by the faint breeze, filled all the foreground; and one red sail was reflected in it, the shadow, as Powell pointed out to his companion, appearing to reach down with perfect accuracy of color and detail to an extraordinary depth.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," sighed the Marchesa. "Let us look at it a little longer." And they seated themselves, accordingly, upon a stone bench fronting the unusual prospect.

"Even though it makes you sigh," said Powell, smiling.

"Did I?" she asked in a tone which showed that her momentary fit of depression had been an unconscious one. "The fact is that I cannot care for Venice as you do. There is an awful stillness in it.

Its beauty is like the fifth act of a tragedy, too painful to be long endured. I feel always as if its mouldering walls might fall and crush me. Something tells me that the saddest hour of my life will come in Venice."

"Life has sadness enough for us all, Heaven knows," returned Powell, reflectively. "Our best course, I think, is to admit it only when it comes, and do without presentiments."

"That is true, and my presentiments are trivial. I am willing to let the future take care of itself. The things that have happened are the things that interest me ; tell me something about them."

Powell laughed. "What on earth can I find to tell you ?"

"Dear Signor Max, do you not know it is of yourself that I long to hear ? Your triumphs I have learned ; I rejoice at them as only an old friend can—to some extent I have shared in them. But the

friend who does no more is only half a friend. The pleasure life allots you is nothing to the pain. Will you not accept the sympathy I offer, and let me share that too?"

Powell laughed again, though now with obvious effort. "What has given you this impression of my life?" he asked.

"Your own words, spoken and written," she answered. "There is an undercurrent of grief in all your work, and in your talk last night it came again. Why will you deny it? The great hope of your life is unfulfilled.

"I do not attempt to deny it," said Powell, gravely. "He who cannot hide the scar, must, of necessity, admit that it was once a wound. But a hope never to be fulfilled passes, as mine has passed, taking, as it were, the bloom of human kindness with it. I often think I have no kindness left. I am not a man, but a machine for registering the woes and

weaknesses, the vices and follies of the world around me ; the possible reward, a leaf of laurel withering in my hand. It is a great destiny, a high ambition ! But only see how pitiable our human nature is ! Yesterday, I was bitterly envious of my poor gondolier, who took me home to see his wife and children."

" Home ! " repeated the Marchesa. " I like that pretty English word of yours ; it adds another charm to life, it promises so much. How can you resist the promise ? Be happy, and let the other strivings go. The way is very simple and very easy if you would only see it. You should marry."

She smiled as she said this, as if she imagined that he would smile in return and parry the home-thrust with some light word. But he did not trust himself to look at her. With his eyes fixed upon the blue line of hills toward which the sun was slowly sinking, he answered in a firm, low voice :

"No! I shall not marry. The hope is gone forever."

The color came and went in her face; she turned away her eyes, but made no



other movement. Then, after a long silence, broken only by the trickle of the fountain, she spoke again in an altered tone.

"So there is a woman—one, only one?"

"Yes," he confessed. "There is a woman."

"I am very sorry for you," she continued gently. "But wherein lies the obstacle? The fault must be wholly yours. You are too distrustful of yourself, perhaps. It cannot be that she does not love you."

With a bitter smile Powell rose and paced up and down in the path before her. "Spare me the story," he said, at last. "To tell you would not help me, and I cannot do it. You must forgive the reserve which your friendship almost persuaded me to overcome. If I stop half-way, it is because we do not know the depth of our own feelings until they have been sounded. You see for yourself my scar goes far below the surface; it is not a scar, it is still a wound."

"Yes," assented the Marchesa. "I see, too, that I had no right to question you. Do not think the worse of me for my indiscretion. Count me, rather, among those whose wit and hands are at your service, whenever they are needed."

He thanked her in words that he felt were somewhat cold and formal. She interrupted him with an impatient gesture, and rising, suggested that they should go back to the house. At the first turn in the path a servant met them with a visiting-card for the Marchesa, who smiled upon reading it.

"The Commander Savelli. Dear soul! Do you know him?"

"Not that I remember," said Powell.  
"Who is he?"

"A naval officer. You will like each other, I am sure. He is an old friend of mine. I call him the Commander of the Faithful."

They heard his laugh as they went up, and he met them at the door of the drawing-room, where he had been entertaining the Signora Carrera. He proved to be short and plump, with closely-clipped hair, prematurely white, in striking contrast to his dark mustache and eyebrows.

His manners were of unaffected simplicity, he smiled frequently and pleasantly, his laughter had a boyish ring in it. Although he was not in uniform, the air of the sea still clung to him, the cut and precision of his dress as well as his hearty frankness denoting a sailor of many voyages.

By the first words which passed between this new-comer and the Marchesa Powell learned that the commander was off duty, and that they had been together somewhere in the mountains ; he also saw by the twinkle of the man's eye that the two had some joke in common, relating probably to the sailor's unexpected visit. She had given him the slip, it appeared. Yet, evidently, he was not unwelcome. Her tone in describing him to Powell had indicated that, and she received him now with the utmost cordiality. Both men were urged to stay to dinner, for charity's sake, the Marchesa said. Her entreaty



had so much the air of a command that Powell immediately complied with it. Savelli, for his part, needed no urging; he had expected to stay from the first.

Dinner was served in a high central hall looking out upon the garden and all aglow with the sunset. The windows were wide open, and the fragrance of flowers filled the air. The meal, well-ordered and enlivened by a golden wine of Pomino, old and rare, began merrily and grew merrier still as the stars came out in the darkening sky. Savelli was the head and front of it. After a time the others did little but listen to his talk, which dashed brilliantly from one thing to another, gilding all it touched with his enthusiasm. He had strong tastes in art, a passion for music and the theatre; but his opinions were modestly expressed without a shade of arrogance. He told tales of the sea, of adventure by night in foreign cities, of strange people with whom

his experience had thrown him ; treating all so lightly and so wittily that the room resounded with the laughter in which he did not scruple to lead off. Then candles and cigars were brought ; and, reminding the men that to sit long over their wine was a brutal English fashion not to be tolerated, the two women rustled away.

The commander moved nearer and began to talk of books, showing at once that his reading had not been limited to the masterpieces of his own language. He knew his companion's work in its original form.

" You write, of course ? " said Powell.

" I ? Oh, no ! "

" Why not, since you have so much to say—with all your knowledge of the world ? "

" I have neither the skill nor the patience," said Savelli, laughing. " And I have told you all I know. My mind is full, but it is a very little mind. It is like

one of those small shops under the arcade in Paris on the Rue de Rivoli. There is no *arrière boutique* in it. All my wares are in the window."

"Too much modesty!" Powell retorted.

"No," said the other, growing almost serious for the moment; "that is not my failing. On the contrary, I am over-ambitious. My aim is high—much too high; but it is well to have the mountain-peak in view, even if one never lives to reach it."

"Yes," said Powell, sympathetically; "if one could not look a little above the world to some such shining mark, life, no doubt, would be intolerable."

There was a pause, during which they heard faint notes of a piano softly played. "The Marchesa makes sweet music," said Savelli. "Let us go in."

They rose, and Powell, as he passed the window, stopped to look down at the quiet darkness. Far out in the lagoon a

point of light shone clearly, as if some planet had fallen there into the sea.

"What is that light?" he asked.

Savelli joined him at the window. "The Virgin's Shrine on the island of San Giorgio in Alega," said he. "Do you remember? There is an old fort with the Madonna at the angle of its ruined wall. The sailors keep her lamp always lighted. It is a pious duty—their safety too."

"This is very beautiful," said Powell. "How can one possess the Palazzo del Riso and not live here to enjoy it?"

"Because one is a woman, *amico*. Our dear Marchesa detests her Venice cordially."

"Why is she here then?"

"Why, indeed? We may not know—we may only guess."

"But I cannot even do that."

Savelli stopped, holding the door half open, and his eyes met Powell's with an

intent look. "No?" he said; "then it is you who err from excess of modesty, not I. And yet it is your trade to dissect the heart. Try a little." So, with a laugh that was ironical this time, he led the way to the drawing-room. They found the Marchesa improvising at the piano. At their request she played on, but after a few moments broke off abruptly. "Sing us something, dear Commander of the Faithful," said she.

"Eh? What shall I sing to you?"

"Whatever you please?"

"*Santo Cielo!* why not? I have found some words in a book. I will find an air also. They are charming—you will see." Then he sat down, trying the keys, and after a prelude breaking into song expressively.

"I am the moth of the night  
Thy candle brings;  
In thy clear, roseate light  
I burn my wings.

“Out of the window leaning,  
Look down below,  
That I, one last ray gleaning,  
Thy love may know.

“I am the cloud in the sky,  
Too near the sun :  
Of a look content to die,  
If love be won.” \*

“*Ebbene?*” he said, turning to his hostess with a smile.

“That is very pretty—but it is very sentimental,” she replied.

“And being so, is it so much the better—or so much the worse?”

“The better, if it could be. There is no love like that, I think. No matter; pray go on.”

“No,” said Savelli, rising; “it is late. And what you say reminds me of some other words I have found in a book—an English one. It is a little question for all the company to answer.”

\* After Emilio Praga.

"Good! An enigma! Let us have it. What does the gentleman desire to know?"

"This," said Savelli, looking from one to the other as he spoke. "Can a noble heart, once broken, ever be repaired? Could Othello, Romeo, or Hamlet, for example, have loved again, had some antidote been provided for the dagger and the poison-bowl? What says the company?"

"What do you say yourself?" asked the Signora Carrera.

"Frankly, I say no."

"Quite as frankly, then, I say yes," she rejoined, with a smile of experience.

"And you—Signor Anatomist?"

"I say yes, too," said Powell; "since the heart, however noble, is but human."

"Right—right!" cried the signora, with gratified applause.

The Marchesa smiled and mused a moment when her turn came. "It is a

great question," she said slowly, upon being urged to speak. "I cannot answer it, I confess."

"*Che, che!*!" exclaimed the commander, impatiently. "I hoped that you, at least, would agree with me."

"I neither agree nor disagree. My answer can wait. Some day I will give it to you."

"Bah! Let us go to bed, and sleep, Signor Americano. The ways of woman are inscrutable."

"And, pray, is she the better or worse for that?" inquired the Marchesa, rising, as they took leave.

"Ah, *donna carissima*," said Savelli, stooping to kiss her hand. "One woman has no best and no worst—she is perfection always."

So with jest and compliment the men departed; but not before the Marchesa had bound Powell by appointment to visit with her an out-of-the-way church

containing a fine Titian that he did not know. When the great door of the palace closed behind them, Savelli, who lodged near San Marco, proposed that they should walk, since their way was the same and he was sure of finding it. Up and down they went, now close to the water's edge, now far above it, over crooked bridges and slippery stairways, along streets that were hardly more than crevices, where the echoing footfall suggested thieves and murder. Then coming to the Grand Canal and hailing a ferry, they were set down at the corner of the vast, empty square ; here Savelli turned off with a hearty *a rivederla, buon anatomicista*, to Powell, who strolled on alone.

Their walk had been like a game of follow-my-leader, with little opportunity for conversation in it ; obviously, too, the commander was suddenly disinclined to talk. The interesting after-dinner discus-

sion, therefore, had not been resumed, and the probable cause of the Marchesa's flight to Venice remained undetermined by word or sign ; not so, in Powell's mind, however. Reviewing carefully the events of the last two days, he found that they pointed to but one conclusion, which was very flattering to his vanity and which would certainly have been reached sooner by a vainer man. The charming Marchesa del Riso had come to Venice simply because of the illustrious Signor Powell's arrival there. Savelli did not doubt it ; and it was confirmed by evidence that Savelli did not know. Notably, that of her altered demeanor in the garden when she had wrung from him the admission that there was a woman (not herself) for whom he cared more than for anything else in the world. In spite of that, this woman loved him, it was clear ; perhaps had always loved him from the first, through all these intervening years. Equally clear

was it that Savelli in his turn loved her. The open-hearted sailor had all the air of one prostrate before his idol, regardless of the by-standers. His love was the mountain-top of his thinly-veiled metaphor, too high to be attained. He was the speck of cloud struggling with the invincible sun—the night-moth, happy to hover about his candle-flame with the full consciousness that it promised him nothing but destruction.

Powell leaned over the parapet of one of the Riva bridges, fronting the hull of a great steamer at anchor under San Giorgio's tower in the still lagoon. "Poor Commander of the Faithful!" he thought; "he hasn't the ghost of a chance. He is in my shoes, but he wears them with a difference." Then remembering how he had shrunk into himself at the allusion to his own pain, Powell laughed bitterly. "I might have told her," he added, with a sigh. "It would not have taken long."

In truth, great sorrows are always simple, and the plot of Powell's tragedy could be given in a few words. The girl he loved had refused him, that was all. He had known her all his life, and their friendship had been so intimate that he was startled and stunned by her answer, which he could hardly believe to be the true one. Within three weeks he had begged for a reconsideration—by letter, this time ; she had closed the correspondence curtly and decisively. It would never be possible to care for him "in that way," she wrote ; yet they might always remain good friends if he pleased—she hoped, at least, that they would continue to meet without bitterness. But half-way measures were not at all to her lover's liking. Five years had passed, during which they had not exchanged a dozen phrases, and in all that time she had never been absent from his mind one hour. Cruel and uncompromising as he some-

times thought her, she was still his type, his high ideal. She had figured in his work under twenty different disguises. All other women he met were compared with her and found wanting. She had never married, but if this fact afforded ground for the hope of a reconciliation, he did not admit the hope. The chilling words of her letter remained her last for him. So they were growing old apart, yet linked together by a tender recollecton — his only vulnerable point. For, as if the weapon of her indifference had been steeped in subtle poison, he felt a change for the worse in his nature—the hardness of his trade, he called it—slowly overcoming him. She had condemned him to walk alone through life, and he was working out the sentence, hardening, hardening always. The joys and sorrows of other lives had become mere items for his notebook ; his capacity for enjoyment grew less and less, and all experience was

marred by the effort to make it profitable. He magnified men's faults, diminishing their virtues proportionately; and he moved among them with sharpened wits, keen-eyed and callous as a surgeon in the operating-theatre of some public hospital.

A puff of white smoke went up from the steamer, and there was a stir upon her deck. Powell looked at his watch. "She is off for Trieste in an hour," said he. "Why not pack on board of her, and go." He strode on briskly toward his hotel, but soon slackened his pace. "It is always so," he reflected; "when the woman advances, the man retreats. He must pursue, not be pursued. But why should I run away merely because this one flings me her hand and I don't care to pick it up? I am a fool! The Marchesa is excellent material—a most interesting study! Let me stay a while, and study her; positively, it is my duty. There

will be other steamers for Trieste." Then, smiling at the thought, he went to his room, and watched this one weigh anchor and steam off with flashing lights between the islands to the sea.

When Powell went over to the Lido the next morning for a dip in the Adriatic, the first figure he found there was Savelli's, in clinging red garments, rolling over and over through the lines of surf like a crimson porpoise. The day was very fine; a fleet of fishermen dotted the horizon with sails of many hues; the sea



had put on its most inviting blue, and its temperature, as recorded by a placard at the landing, had risen to an incredible height. Savelli, having been in the water an hour already, seemed disinclined to leave it. He was armed with a huge india-rubber ball which he tossed into a merry cloud of splashing Italians who buffeted the plaything about. It was finally knocked over the line into the space allotted to female bathers, where Savelli, going to its rescue, remained with it. By the time that Powell went ashore, after a moderate swim, the commander had developed into a professor of aquatic sport, and was trying to inspire a very stout Venetian woman with sufficient confidence to float. He sent word, however, that his bath was over, appearing upon the terrace shortly afterward fully clothed and ready, after his glass of vermouth, for the return to town. As the two men landed at the Piazzetta the sharp report of the

noon gun sent up a cloud of doves that fluttered out from every window-ledge and cornice-angle.

"Silly birds!" said Savelli, as they beat the air with startled wings; "to hear that every day, and still be frightened by it. And men are just as weak; experience can teach them nothing."

"Doubted!" commented Powell. "Experience has taught me much."

"Ah! But you are strong—you, who were set apart for purposes of dissection. With me it is different; if I had twenty lives to live, I should do in all of them precisely what I am doing now."

"And what is that?" asked Powell, laughing.

"Nothing at all! I have a hunger of the sea. Let us go to breakfast."

They sat long over the table in one of the cool, shaded windows of the Quadri, discussing many things, from a possible future state to the splendid detail of the

cathedral they looked out upon. But not until Powell, remembering his appointment, abruptly rose to go, did the Commander of the Faithful touch upon one special problem which interested them both.

"Tell me," he asked, "has the science of your experience taught you why a certain enchanting friend of ours comes to Venice?"

"Yes, commander, if I read the signs correctly."

"All the better, then. Success to her; I drink it."

"That means," said Powell, "that I should drink success to you."

Savelli put down his glass with a troubled look in his face.

"Signor Powell," he said, solemnly; "she is a star in heaven, and I am of the earth."

"And what am I, then?" asked the other, with a bitter laugh.

Savelli's face cleared, and, smiling, he offered his hand. "Do not deceive yourself," he said; "you are a man of genius, born to make her happy, it appears. Good luck go with you."

"Thank you," said Powell, shaking hands warmly. "It may be that I have found my mission in the world."

At the door he looked back. Savelli had resumed his place at the table; but his face was turned away; he sat with his cheek resting upon his hand in a thoughtful attitude, motionless as a statue, staring out of the window at the cathedral doors. "How the fellow's eyes glistened!" thought Powell, as he brushed rapidly through the crowded arcade. "That is true devotion. It is her happiness he cares for—not his own. With what sublime unconsciousness a man may prove himself a hero! A smile will do it. And what am I to do? Pshaw! He is out of the question, absolutely, with his stars and

candle-flames. Marchesa, by your leave, I'll study you."

He hired the first gondolier who hailed him, and found her waiting at her palace-gate. The tide was at the flood, and even in the lesser canals it kept its pure, transparent green, rippling so clearly above the weedy foundations that the smallest crab at rest upon them could be discerned. Through the shining afternoon the gondola glided on along old walls of brick, salt-encrusted, and dyed by wind and wave with soft Venetian tints of yellow, green, and brown, into quiet regions where only the splash of their own oars broke the delicious silence ; where scarlet clusters of the trumpet-flower overhung them, and the smooth white arch of every bridge caught its fine tracery of shadows, changing like the forms in a kaleidoscope at each new motion of the playful water. They passed an abandoned church with high pointed win-

dows all in ruins, and a few turns more brought them to the steps of a small square, flanked by the portal of San Marziale where was the picture they had come to see.

A smiling boy, hardly big enough to wield his boat-hook, drew in their prow, and was then dispatched for the custodian, only to return without him. But half the neighborhood was now interested in the matter, and the important functionary, sought this way and that, finally hurried up with jingling keys. He was profuse in his apologies. It would have been a grave misfortune if the distinguished strangers had failed to see his treasure, which, he complained, was rarely visited. There it hung, on the left, above the first altar. The light was good, but it would be better in the morning. The signor must bring his wife again. Then he hobbled away into the sacristy, leaving the master's eloquent silence to speak for itself.

The picture is a large one, illustrating the story of Tobit; remarkable for a glorious figure of the angel in a flowing crimson garment, leading his charge by the hand, and looking down upon him tenderly. It is Titian at his best. For color, strength, and beauty this heroic conception, striding across the dim landscape with perfect freedom of action, impresses itself instantly upon the mind, to hold its place there ever afterward unrivalled. The sacristan's absurd blunder, which had brought a flush to the Marchesa's cheek, was at once forgotten, and the two sat before his priceless jewel for some time without a word.

"It is hopelessly fine," said Powell at last.

"Yes," she sighed. "Ah! If one had faith that in this poor life of ours there could be a guardian angel!"

"We have gone beyond it," he returned, lightly; "perhaps because we no longer

need such intervention. Some of us, at least, do not—one, in particular, who is perfection always."

The Marchesa knit her brows with a look of irritation. "It was Savelli who said that," she replied.

"Yes, it was Savelli," said Powell, recalling involuntarily that patient silhouette left behind in the *café*-window. "Yes, Savelli."

She turned upon him suddenly with restless eagerness. "You are most perplexing," she protested. "Tell me; why did you say 'yes' to his question about the cure for a broken heart—you, who pretend to carry with you a grief that is eternal?"

"I thought I should puzzle you," he explained, laughing. "Of course I took that ground merely for purposes of argument."

"So you have not changed your mind?"

"Oh, no! One does not change his mind twice a day."

She looked away from him now, nervously tapping with her foot a block in the pavement that bore traces of heraldic emblems.

"You are all wrong," she declared. "You have no right to brood upon a loss that is irreparable. You belong to the present, and should accept its joys, its obligations. The past is past—dead, like that poor fellow at our feet whose name we cannot read."

"Go on, my dear Signora! You mean, of course—"

"I mean that you should marry."

"As you said yesterday. All I can say is that you do not know your man. You do not dream what a love like mine can be."

"No," she admitted, speaking now less warmly. "That is your secret, upon which even an old friend may not venture to intrude. But I have still some friendly



curiosity that may be gratified without betraying secrets. Pray what is she like, this woman, who has inspired a love like yours?"

"She is tall and fair," said Powell, forgetting himself completely in all he conjured up by his description. "Her eyes are gray, and her smile is the sweetest in the world. She is as radiant in her beauty as that angel there above our heads; she is good and pure, and true to herself, divinely true. Why should I hesitate to tell the truth? I cannot make her love me—that is all. She regrets this; she pities me, I know. That she can do no more is a source of unhappiness to her, but it is not to be remedied. She will not feign what she has never learned to feel; she cannot give me her whole heart, and so she gives me nothing. She is one whom no motives of self-interest could force into a marriage; one who would die rather than practise such deceit; one who——"

He stopped at a movement of his companion, who had turned pale as death. She gave him an appealing look with eyes that were full of tears. He did not need to be told the reason. In drawing his ideal portrait, he had unconsciously drawn the reverse of it in the same breath. By a word of his, spoken at her own request, the Marchesa, with her title, dearly-bought, had been condemned.

He took her hand, speaking again in a tone of unwonted gentleness.

“I am sorry I said that to you.”

She flung herself into his arms, sobbing.

“You can never love me, then?”

For answer he bent his head to hers, and kissed her. But he was moved to this act by an impulse of compassion, not of love. She understood the motive. With a cry of pain, as if he had struck her, she pushed him away, and, springing up, covered her face for shame.



"How could I do that!" she moaned.  
"How could I!"

He would have followed her, but she stopped him angrily.

"I hate you!" she cried. "Never let me see your face again."

"Marchesa——"

"Don't speak to me! Go! Go—only go!"

He hesitated for a moment longer, then turned upon his heel, and strode off in the direction that the sacristan had taken. The man was setting the room in order, with no thought beyond his small affairs.

"I will go out this way," said Powell, fumbling for his fee.

"Certainly, Signor. And the Signora?"

Powell looked back into the dreary, vacant church. "She is already gone," said he.

"Ah! The Signor will come again in the morning light?"

"Undoubtedly. Good day to you."

"Good day, Signor, and many thanks."

Setting forth on foot, Powell soon lost his way in the unfamiliar quarter. Such directions as he could obtain only made matters worse, and not a gondola was to be found. At last he hailed a barge laden with cherries from the Island of Mazzorbo, and was slowly poled along to the Rialto, where he knew his ground. As he came out ten minutes later upon the Riva, his eye was attracted by a brilliant red buoy that marked an unoccupied mooring a few hundred feet from the shore. "There will be no steamer for Trieste to-night," he muttered. "No matter; I can take the morning train."

The next day, when he was on the point of embarking for the station, there came a letter, unsigned, and containing only these words in a blurred hand that he had quite forgotten :

"I have been pacing my room for half

the night, trying to forget. I can neither forgive myself, nor understand myself. Think of me as one who despises her own weakness, and then put me forever from your mind. May all happiness be yours. May you live to possess the love you long for, and may your ideal prove to you, as to herself, divinely true. *Addio eternamente.*"

Powell tore this in two ; then his ruling passion conquered him, and, instead of flinging away the pieces, he stuffed them into his pocket. "Very excellent material!" said he.

His work goes on, and it is known the world over. He is a shrewd observer with a firm touch, quoted and admired as one of the great writers in his generation. If this fame does not survive the day, it will be because a full measure of human sympathy has been denied him. He lacks the woman's heart that, where genius is,

always reveals itself beneath the man's strong hand. He would have done better to marry, his friends say. And were this said in his presence, he would readily admit it to be true.

He hears, by chance, from Italy, that his former friend, the Marchesa, goes much into the world, and has been perplexed by many suitors, one of whom seems irresistible. He is a dozen years her junior, and a foreign prince of one of the oldest houses. His name, his famous jewels are at her feet. She will stoop for them, and die a princess, if the world is to be trusted. Meanwhile, her Commander of the Faithful still waits for his reward. He is a good sailor with a stout heart, and with enduring faith in all the virtues of his idol. Whatever happens, his lamp will burn unquenched at the Madonna's shrine.



# THE SONG OF THE COM- FORTER

BY JOHN J. A'BECKET





... . . . FROM the rough yellow road led a path to a small wayside chapel, while higher up, its white walls rising above the encircling green like the soft breast of a dove, stood the Convent of the Comforter, a thin blue smoke oozing indolently from one of its chimneys. Over all, like

a sapphire, stretched the pure serenity of a cloudless sky.

Up the road slowly came a young girl. Her lagging steps and drooping head were a pathetic strain of dissonance in the symphony of the buoyant spring. In nature such joyous energy in its calm, vernal functions; in her, such a protest against the weariness of being. It was like a tear in a circle of brilliants.

Climbing to the lichen-covered top of a rock by the roadside, she sank down.

Not ungrateful to the tender fellowship of the bright spring-tide, she wondered wearily whether time would bring her ever again into unison with happiness, or would Death, which had passed her by as she waited wistfully for his coming, return again and take her?

She had been a year in Europe, alone. Through a long ordeal of severe study she had labored unfalteringly to perfect an exquisite voice, sustained by an ardent

desire to compass the highest that her art could yield. Her master, so sensitive to artistic excellence as to be crabbed, and so independent, through success in teaching, as to be merciless to mediocrity, devoted himself to her progress with an unflagging vigor. Six weeks ago he had said to the girl, with a brusque wave of his hand:

"Go, and conquer the world! I can do no more for you. You have a voice which God can listen to with complacency. The world will listen to it, too." She had secured a good engagement. Her master and his friends had made the verdict of the public a matter of little doubt. She herself, with the fervid exultation of a musical temperament, felt that she was about to gather a plenteous harvest of glory and of riches by her powers. It was the dawn of her day of triumph.

Then—oh, the agony of reverting to it! her sorrows came. Time might soften the

death of her mother to her. Perhaps in years to come the sense that she had been absent from that New England death-bed where a lonely woman yearned for the touch and glance of a daughter, might grow less a reproach. Now, it was hopelessly bitter to think of the pitilessness of death in taking her as the term of her sacrifice ended, and reward to the hundred-fold was about to begin.

Yet this was a wound of Nature, and Nature has her antidotes. But for him! Could the time ever come when the thought of what *he* had done would not be like the stroke of a whip? She could not recall that cruel letter of his without a flush rising in her cheeks as if she had been buffeted? It had struck her down with such double force, coming so fast on her mother's death. Her first instinct on rallying from the anguish of that stroke had been to turn to him; to think what she was to him, what he was to her. The world was not empty

while that frank, faithful, blue-eyed New Englander wore her in his heart, that noble soul whom she was proud to honor and love.

There was the pang! Each time she recalled him, it was to go through this brutal task of correcting herself again. The man she had worshipped was a phantom. She had created it and set it like an idol in her heart, and he had cast it out. She had put him there for what she thought him, and he had forced her to dethrone him for what he was.

She had been very ill. But the fibre that feels most is the fibre that parts last. She did not die; she regretted even yet that she had not. But in spite of her waiting at the open portal with more than resignation, Death had passed her by. A languid woman had come back to life; a woman who awoke in the morning with a pang to recovered consciousness, and who, at night, sank into sleep's oblivion with a sigh of relief.

She had not sung once since her sorrows had stricken her. They had cared for her till she reached convalescence. Then, with his dogmatic kindness, Ferrari had told her to go to the mountains and rest in the soft spring till she felt the need of music again.

"When you wish to sing, you are cured," he said.

She had come obediently. It was comfort to have someone assume the mastery and direct her course when she felt such a listless indifference to all things that she could determine herself to nothing. She had come here to this little village, clinging to the slope of the mountain, and had gone to a simple, good-hearted *contadina*, whose deference was not without dignity. She had a room about whose windows vines clambered, and looking forth from them she saw the woods rising above her, and the red-tiled roof of the Convent of the Comforter pricking through the trees.

The little church could not be seen. Bianca used to go there on Sundays and hear one of the Brotherhood sing the Mass.

Each day the girl walked forth, submitting with patient resignation to the burden of a life despoiled of appetite, aim, and vigor. This gladsome day of spring was the first that had seemed to quicken her vitality; and she rested in its peace and almost forgot.

So she sat there on the great rock, the waves of melancholy lapping her soul, with her dark eyes looking up to the blue of the overhanging sky. As she let them fall they descended on the figure of a young monk, slowly walking down the road saying his Office from the Breviary which he carried in his hands. He was in perfect harmony with the scene. Tall, broad-shouldered, supple, with the sinuous movement which goes with elastic muscles, there was a rhythmic smoothness in his gait. His eyes were riveted on his book. The thick

brown hair clustered about his broad forehead, and his cheeks, with their clear olive-tint, sank in slightly below the cheek-bones. His eyelids were large and full, with long, thick lashes.

For some nameless cause the girl felt an instant affinity with him. The suggestion of strength and calm control was supporting. He turned up the little path which led off from the road to the church and disappeared. It seemed a loss as he passed from view, and she felt drawn after him. He looked so simple, so true; and what was true came home to her. And to her sore heart there was something appealing in the thought that he was cut off from the world, buried here in the white convent, mother and sisters left behind him forever down in the plain below.

As she sat in her revery the tones of an organ came to her from the church. It must be he who had gone there and was playing. Soft and low the strains

were borne to her in faint gusts of melody. She felt her soul stirring beneath the influence of the music as it had not since her life had grown so dark.

She slipped down from the rock and slowly made her way up the path. The music sounded fuller as she approached. She went on until she stood at the porch of the church and saw it was empty. She hesitated a moment, and then entered ; the interior was bare and poor ; the walls were whitewashed. At the end was an altar, in front of which hung a brass lamp, suspended by a long chain from the ceiling. In it glowed a spark of red, where a burning taper shone through the thick ruby glass. On the right-hand side of the little sanctuary was a Pietà, the Mother of the Christ with her dead Son stretched across her lap. Through the cold, bare church surged the music. The monk was apparently improvising, for there was no strict development of theme ; only the

merging of one phrase into another as they occurred to him.

She put an old chair which stood near, back against the wall, and sitting down, closed her eyes and abandoned herself to the sweetness of the music. The monk had a musician's soul in him ; she could tell that by the way in which his wandering fancy touched the keys. There were sudden transitions, though all he played was grave and sweetly sombre. Her soul lived with new life as she sat there motionless, while the waves of music rolled through the little church, broke about the Mother and her dead Son, and flowed back upon her in rippling consolation.

Oh, the restfulness of it ! She uttered a sigh of thanksgiving that music could still so master her spirit. No converse could have done for her what that dignified harmony did ; it was a messenger of peace. She sat there, unable to move,

and uncaring, till she heard the flow of music cease, and then a slight sound as the cover was placed over the key-board. She rose at once with a long sigh and hastily left the church. She did not wish the monk who had gone there and played his soul out on the organ in the sacred confidence of solitude, to know that another, and that other a woman, had listened to his communings with his spirit. She felt that he had expressed himself as naturally and as artlessly through this medium as the birds moving through the cloister of the woods. He was singing his spring-song—a song, like theirs, without words, but a song grave and sweet, and with soul in it.

She walked slowly back to Bianca's cottage, where the vines clustered so thickly about her windows. The good peasant woman looked at her when she came in, and sighed to herself. Under the pale cheeks of the girl was a delicate

pink color, and there was a brilliant light in her large eyes. They were signs of greater vigor, perhaps, yet they only seemed to accentuate her frailty ; but the good Bianca kept these thoughts within her heart. To the girl she spoke cheerfully of the bright spring day. Had her walk refreshed her ? Yes ; she felt better than she did when she went out. She felt stronger. She did not tell Bianca that the monk's music had sent the blood coursing through her more than the ravishing day. That was her secret. Untold, it seemed so much more a solace all her own.

The Italian spring held many of these days of delicate brightness as the earth ripened on into the flush of summer. The girl took her way up the mountain road with a lighter heart, even if her steps had not a more elastic tread. She knew no tonic could do her such good as that pure music with its mellow chords

and subtle transitions, like a change from tears to a smile. The thought that pleased her most was that the young monk was pouring out his soul into these strains of music. And she grasped them so clearly! There were sadness and resignation, and at times, jubilant measures of hope in his chords; never despair, nor the bitter unrest which beats against bars.

She began to feel that she was getting better. As she sat and listened to the pleading tones the feeling within her was not happiness, not excitement, not melancholy; but it participated in them all. It was rest and comfort. She could have sat for hours in this glad emancipation from her weary self. When the music ceased it was an effort to rise and hasten forth, the mantle of her sorrow falling heavily about her again.

She always felt this desire, that the strong monk should not learn she was

there. Should she know that he was playing with the consciousness that one was listening to him, even were he to play the self-same music (and she was sure he would not), it would have appealed to her in not this subtle, comforting way. His soul exhaled some sorrow to itself, alone, and her soul felt it, unknown. The charm lay there.

The monk was so recollected that he never remarked her. Two or three times he had passed her on the mountain road. But his eyes were either fixed upon his Breviary, for he seemed to be saying his Office much of the time, or else they were modestly cast down. After a while she felt safe in meeting him, it was so hard to distract him from this concentration. It was only through his music that he seemed to go forth from himself, and then it was a flight toward heaven.

Happily for the girl, he went almost every day to the church and played upon

the organ. There were certain airs which he played frequently, and she got to know them and to look for their recurrence. One in particular appealed to her more than any other. The monk gave it with an intensity of expression that showed how deeply he felt it. It was a series of aspirations, prayerful, but exultant withal ; the softly pleading tones of the prelude would swell into greater strength, and, as if soaring higher and higher with the increasing fervor of the suppliant, closed in a very ecstasy of impassioned entreaty. She got quickly to know it by heart, and often as she sat at the vine-clad window of Bianca's cottage and saw the night draw down over the mountain, the music sang itself in her heart, while she watched the stars pierce through the dusky blue of the sky.

One morning, a few weeks later, Bianca had sallied forth to mass in the little church. When she returned and they

were eating their simple breakfast, she said to the girl: "Signora, I remembered you to-day in church. It is the feast of the Holy Ghost. They call Him the Comforter, you know, and I prayed that He would comfort you, in body and in mind. The hymn to Him is very beautiful, dear lady."

"Then that white convent in the woods is the Convent of the Holy Ghost, is it not?" she returned. "They call it the Convent of the Comforter."

"Yes," answered Bianca. "Would you like to read the hymn in the Breviary to the Holy Ghost? I have it in my prayer-book with the Italian words," and Bianca got her leather-covered prayer-book and pointed out the well-fingered page. The Italian translation was not necessary except for a few words, as the girl had learned Latin in the High School of her town, and had sung many church arias written in it. Ferrari had taught

her the soft Italian pronunciation of the old Roman tongue. But the invocations and petitions of the hymn were soothing to her. The very title of Comforter, given to the Holy Ghost, stirred a devotional sense in her heart. She read it through meditatively, and slipped the shiny little book into her pocket when she was done.

That day she was a little later than usual in climbing up the road, but as she drew near she saw the monk, her comforter, striding up the pathway to the church. The afternoon was waning into twilight, and when she followed him and heard the organ, the music took on new grace in the golden brown of the fading light.

He preluded with short, quick chords, some of them harsh, and between them little trembling flights of notes. There was a disquiet in his music that seemed to have an artistic, or at least emotional, jus-

tification. It was a tentative reaching forth for something, the delicate eagerness of the runs and hurried melodic phrases seeming yearning impatience, and the nervous, strong chords the moaning gasps of frustration. It was a joy to hear at last, firm and full, the prayerful melody which had so grown into her soul, melting on the air. What soul he was throwing into it!

Suddenly, her blood gave a leap and her body quivered with its tingling rush through her veins. It was a delight that was almost pain. A tenor voice, clear as a bell and vibrating with sympathetic feeling, soared through the dim church. Never had she heard such tones before. So firm, so crystalline, of so velvety a quality. The monk was singing the song, and singing it like an angel from God. She pressed her hand to her breast, breathing quickly through her parted lips, the ringing voice calling a sudden moisture of

joy to her eyes. There was such pathos in the round tones as they dilated to greater fulness. She could feel that not half the power of the voice was drawn on in that overflow of melody. Ah! if he would pour the full strength of his superb lungs into those heavenly tones.

As a rich note welled forth and then died away in a perfect *diminuendo*, the intensity of her delight weakened her and she clung to the chair. But what was he singing with such overpowering feeling? She bent her head to catch the words. "*Veni, Pater pauperum, Veni, lumen cordium, Veni, Dator munera.*" They were the words she had read that morning in Bianca's prayer-book! This air that had sung itself into her heart was the hymn to the Holy Ghost.

She knew the next phrase in the music. It was the one that had always moved her most. Even on the organ that sudden change to a minor key, and the notes sat-

urated with tears, had thrilled her through and through. And now to hear it sung, and by such a voice!

She remembered that the little prayer-book was still in her pocket, and she hastily drew it forth and turned to the place. She had scarcely found it when the pleading voice broke into the melody :

*"Consolator optime,  
Dulcis hospes animæ,  
Dulce refrigerium."*

Ah, should she not have known that it was a tearful cry to the Comforter. What words could so well have been wedded to such strains. "O best of Comforters, My soul's dear host, O sweet refreshment, Thou!" There was intoxication to her in the high, tremulous tones with their throbbing pathos of entreaty, their melting tenderness. They took her out of herself, and she shook with her swelling emotion. As the last note, a peal of sweetness, sur-

charged the church, she rose involuntarily to her feet, erect and tense.

Then she heard his strong fingers play the prelude again. He could not leave it. With one wild yearning to give her soul its needed outlet, she broke into the exquisite song. She felt herself singing as she had never sung before, not even on that day when Ferrari and his friends had shouted "bravas" over her voice. Never had such a passionate exultation of feeling swept down upon her and borne her off on the strong pinions of song. The voice of the monk had fired her; her whole soul was in her glorious voice, crying to the Comforter with the thrilling tones which God had given her, and which had been so long unused.

She felt that a fuller accompaniment from the organ was supporting her. The instrument had seldom yielded such rich chords, even to the monk's touch. He was inspired, too. And in the overmastering

delight of singing again with all her soul was an undercurrent of delight that for once her music was stirring him.

The passion which controlled her made her pour forth her voice without consciousness of effort or of pain. There was the rapture of singing, and singing as she knew she was.

*"Consolator optime,  
Dulcis hospes animæ,  
Dulce refrigerium."*

The last note rang out full, triumphant, ecstatic. Then something within her seemed utterly to give way, obstacles seemed swept aside, and a warm tide gushed from her mouth. She hastily raised her handkerchief to her lips. It was drenched in a moment, and she saw her light gown stained with the flow.

She could not utter a sound. Above her head, the organ pealed forth a tumult of chords, and the music seemed sweep-

ing over and submerging her. She could not support herself, and sank upon her knees, clutching the bench in front of her, while her eyes involuntarily turned to where the Mother and her dead Son stood palely forth from the shadow. She felt herself dissolving with weakness, but without pain, without fear, without regret.

She heard the strong voice ring through the church again like a spirit's cry. The walls rocked with the jubilant rush of the monk's song, as he poured forth unstintingly the magnificent fulness of his voice.

*"In labore requies,  
In cœstu temperies,  
In fletu solatium."*

Not all the sweet notes reached her, but she heard the passionate ardor that pulsed in the first few words. "*In labore requies.*" "*In toil, repose.*" Then she heard no more music from the organ-loft. Lower and lower she had sunk down. But when

the strong voice poured forth, firm as iron, but vibrant and mellow, on the words "*In fletu solatium,*" they smote her ears as they did those of the marble mother in the dim extremity of the church.

His head erect, his eyes flashing through the thick lashes, the young monk waited with his long fingers pressed lightly on the keys, expectant of the Voice. But there was only an aching stillness.

He waited two or three moments and then let his fingers fall reluctantly from the keys, sighed lightly, and made a lowlier reverence than usual to the altar, where the ruddy light kindled a point of fire in the gloom.

As he came slowly down the creaking wooden steps from the organ-loft, he was erect and glad at the burning thought that a Voice from heaven had sung to him.

When he reached the foot of the stairs he saw her lying on the worn, blue flags, her gown with dark stains upon it. Then

he knew that the being who had sung to him was of a nature kindred with his own.

"When you wish to sing, you are cured," Ferrari had said. She had sung and her ills were over.





# THE HOUSE ON THE HILL-TOP

A TALE OF MODERN ETRURIA

BY GRACE ELLERY CHANNING

*With Illustrations by L. Marchetti*

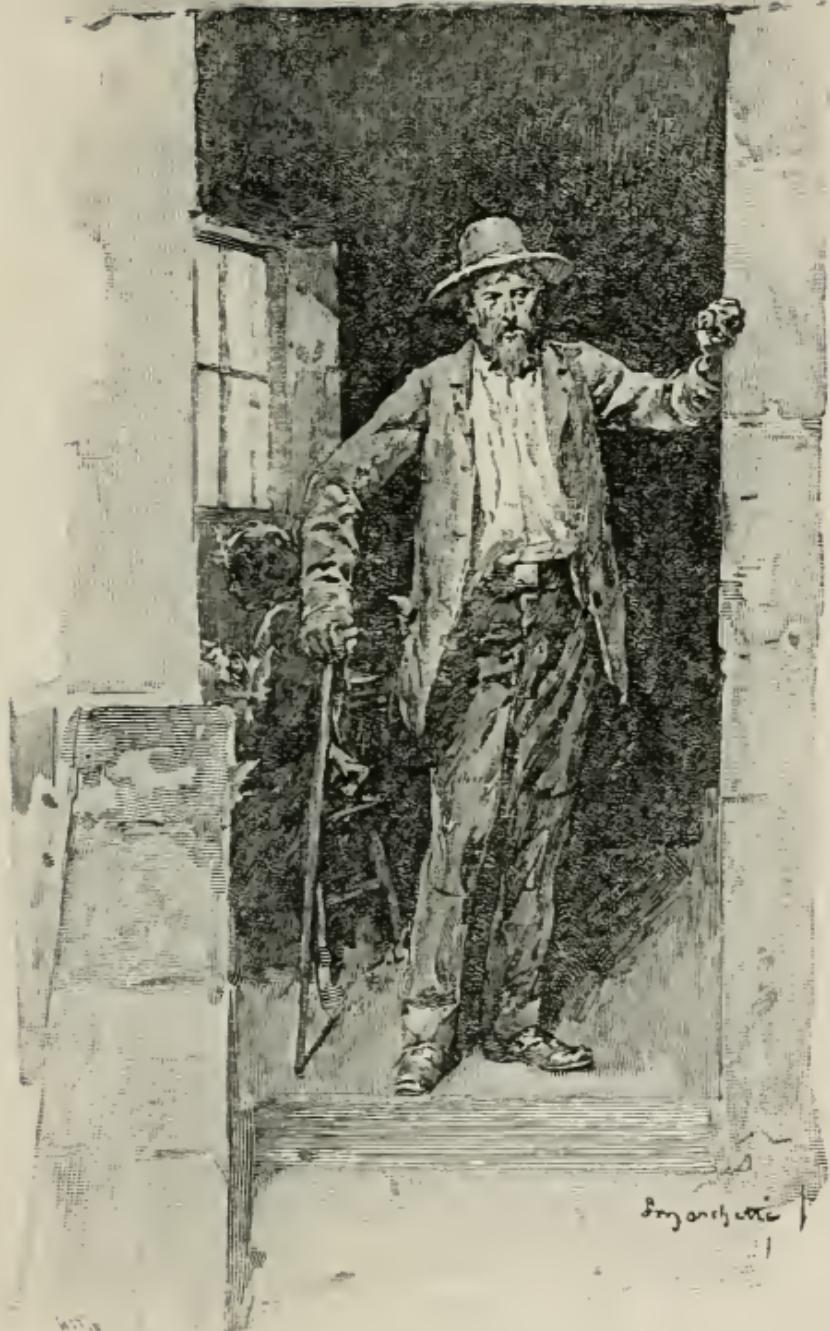


GIULIA, bent over her machine, pulled the threads with flying fingers. Outside the sun beat straight down on the stone steps and the stones of the little court in which the steep road ended. "*Sole di Maggio*," murmured the peasants going up and down the hill, in the same tone of warning with which they had said "*Sole d' Aprile*" a month before, and would say "*Sole di Jugno*" a month later.

It was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, but Giulia had long ago eaten her wedge of black bread which Assunta cut from the huge loaf for all of them—Tonio, Delia, Gemma, and herself—and ever since her fingers had flown without pausing. She had not stopped to look up when Gemma, coughing and shivering in the hot sunshine, passed her on her way

to the *fabbrica*; nor when 'Tonio, bent double with rheumatism, limped painfully down the hill. The little household worked always, but nowadays Giulia was the most industrious of them all, and had her frame drawn to the doorway to catch the light and was busily clicking before even Delia sat down to the pile of straw which daily she converted into fans. Poor stupid Delia, who had had "fear of a dog" once in her youth, and fallen, and now was only good to be the household drudge and make fans all day long and every day. Her highest ambition was to make twenty fans daily; those large, round fans, which shut between two slender sticks, and have a rosette on either side. Sometimes she made only fifteen, but these were bad days.

Giulia wove the braided patterns for straw-hats, and Gemma at the factory made baskets, which the fine ladies who came up to Fiesole from Florence carried



By an artist

away on their arms. The father, 'Tonio, worked at carpentering, but he had been so long ill with rheumatism that he worked less, and never had there been so hard a winter, and never so little money as just now when there was such special need of it.

So Giulia's fingers flew, and she sat patiently all day at her frame. Delia no longer had to find fault with her waywardness, or scold her for running out into the bright sunshine the moment her back was turned, to jump about with Fuffi from sheer gayety. Fuffi disconsolately lay at her feet, or jumped by himself; for was she not about to "finish her thirteenth year," as they say in Tuscany, when they mean one will be fourteen years old—and was she not to take her First Communion in three weeks in the cathedral, together with eleven other girls and sixteen boys? Assuredly; and there was crying need of whole francs to be expended upon the dress and veil, without which she would

never feel that she had properly been confirmed at all. For there are two indispensable, inexorable needs in a Tuscan maiden's life—a white gown and veil for the *prima communione* and a black gown for marriage. Everybody doesn't marry, but everybody—at least, if he be not an actual heathen—is confirmed at some time.

But when one has so much work to live, there is so little, little, to buy white gowns and veils with. The whole family had worked and planned willingly all winter that the *bambina* might not be disappointed, but the *bambina* herself must do her share.

Presently the mother came out, her black handkerchief with green strawberries stamped on it knotted, Tuscan fashion, about her plain, homely, energetic face, a clean blue apron tied about her waist, the faded purple skirt showing below and the dingy plaid waist above.

Assunta was in a hurry, as she always

was ; a Tuscan hurry, which is quite a different thing from a New England hurry, and has in it a good deal of aimless hither-and-thither running, and rapid idling with one's neighbor, compensated by more hasty rushing afterward. She stopped a moment, however, on her way for the Signorina's cream and butter, to look at Giulia's braid, and caution Delia against cutting too much bread for lunch—Assunta herself never lunched. She patted Giulia's shoulder :

" Work, work always, *bambina*, and who knows—" She finished with a smile and a nod.

Pretty Giulia started up and threw her arms about her mother eagerly.

" Oh, Mamina ! do you think I can have the ribbon ? "

" Who knows, *chi lo sa ?*" replied Assunta, with mingled doubt and hope. Oh, how much she had thought about that ribbon herself !



"*Chi lo sa?*" she said again, hopefully.

At that moment Tesita came by—Tesita, on her way to Piazza San Domenico with her blind and one-armed father, there to beg of all the strangers. Just so they went by every day of the year, Tesita a little more ragged and dirty each day, and every day in the year Assunta eyed them with the same disfavor. Every day also Tesita and Giulia looked at one another. Giulia had been forbidden to have anything to do with her former playmate since Beppe lost his sight at the burning of the car-factory and Tesita had become a street-beggar—a "*niente di buona*," Assunta said, with grieved indignation. She was sorry for the *povero*, yes; but bring up a girl on the streets!—why didn't they teach her to weave straw instead? A girl who lives on the streets soon will not work, and when a girl will not work, what happens? "*Niente di buona*—no good." She knew very

well, however, why they didn't teach her to make straw! He who begs makes three soldi, while he who works makes one! Assunta drew her lips together scornfully. Some people will do anything for money—yes, even sell their souls!

So Giulia and Tesita only eyed each other in silence each day. To-day Giulia sat up straighter.

"Wait until she sees my white gown and veil!" she thought, her heart already swelling with pride.

Tesita wrinkled her small nose scornfully. As if everyone in all Fiesole had not known for weeks that Assunta's Giulia was to make her first communion!

"Huh!" thought Tesita in her sinful little soul, "she thinks she's very big because she's going to wear a veil! and work, work, work all day for it! My Babbo could give me two veils if it pleased him. She needn't be so proud; wasn't my Babbo a Sant' Apostolo only last Holy

Thursday?" A cloud passed over her impudently gay small face as she said it. For had not the priest taken that very proud occasion, when he paid the five francs to each holy apostle, to look hard at her (though she made herself as small as never was, behind the apostle's robe), and to say that she was really quite too large to be always on the street, and Beppe should begin to think of sending her for holy instruction, and confirming her; it was ill for a *ragazza* to run the streets at her age. And Beppe, still under the influence of his apostolic dignity and the clean stockings and linen robe he had worn for the occasion—perhaps of the five francs too—had talked seriously of taking rosy, blue-eyed Annina with him in future. Tesita had had all the trouble in the world to change his mind; she had had to remind him how beautifully she talked to the strangers, and how cleverly she arranged him on his knees in piteous post-

ures, for Festas, before Beppe had relented and decided to risk the Father's displeasure yet a little longer. Since then Tesita had grown adroit in whisking Beppe round a corner whenever a black gown came in sight ; not a difficult task to escape the easy-going, rotund Father.

Still, the evil day loomed in the future, and darkened Tesita's horizon at moments —when she saw Giulia especially. To leave off begging meant work—work, abhorred of Tesita's very soul, as only a creature of her untrammelled life could abhor it. True, it rained half the year at Fiesole, and the other half it blistered beneath the sun ; and in rain and sun alike the wind blew, either whirling white dust in clouds, or driving sleet down one's throat and through one's clothes ; but never mind ! how far preferable one's freedom even so. To sit on stone walls, to curl up on the pavements or in the dust itself, and listen to the cabmen and *con-*

*tadini* swearing and talking volubly; to thrust out one's hand at the *Forestieri*, and rehearse one's plea: "*Signore, un poverino! Signorina, un povero vecchietto!*" before lame Ghigo or armless Gigi could get in a word—these were simple pleasures, but sufficing. Giulia, with her veils and her white gowns and her straw-work and her industry, made the soul of Tesita sick! She grunted audibly as she led Beppe by, and Assunta watched her with that compression of the lips which means disapproval, and said, as usual: "*Niente di buona!*" as she hurried after the Signorina's cream.

The stones of the road almost fitted themselves automatically to Assunta's feet, she had trodden them so often. Twenty-three years! Ever since she and Tonio went to housekeeping in that house on the utmost peak of Fiesole; a peak which embraced in vision all Val d' Arno and its watching mountains, and which

now and then an enterprising tourist climbed to, for the view, and boasted of for weeks after. Assunta did not boast, however many times she plodded up and down daily. It had good air, "*buon aria*," she was fond of saying, and a "*bella viste* ;" for Italian eyes can no more help being conscious of beauty than other eyes of bread and meat before them. But nowadays Assunta concerned herself little with the view. As she hastened down the hill she was busy calculating—she had been calculating for months past.

" Say so many lire for the waist, so many more for the skirt ; say three lire for the making (the *sarta* said four, but that might be cut down to three) ; a lire for buttons and the like ; four lire. Then stockings, and boots, and the veil, also ribbon." The folds in her forehead deepened at each item. " Also the *fornaio* must be paid this week, he said, for his daughter too makes her communion."

Assunta sighed ; but for all her sighing she did not slacken her steps or forget the Signorina's cream and butter. The milkman's wife poured out the first into a wee glass flask and wrapped the second in dewy grape-leaves.

"They are good and fresh?" inquired Assunta, with that jealousy she always exhibited in her Signorina's interest.

"*If* they are fresh!" exclaimed the *sposa*, with reassuring enthusiasm. "And how stands it at your house, Assunta?" she added, condescendingly.

"As always ; thanks."

"Tonio goes to work?"

"As he can."

"And the Gemma?"

"Also the Gemma."

"And the *bambina* makes her communion?" said the sympathetic *sposa*.

A smile of pride dawned on Assunta's face.

"Yes, Madame."

"Ah!" exclaimed the *sposa*'s husband, heartily, "that will be a *bella ragazza* some day!"

"And a good one," added his wife, reprovingly. "And the gown and veil?"

Assunta's face fell. "At this hour," she admitted, reluctantly, "they do not find themselves."

"Ah!" said the *sposa*, sympathetically, "it has been a hard winter. Courage—they will be found."

"Let us hope so!" responded Assunta, fervently, appropriating the cream and butter, and departing with *so* many salutations, and "until we see each other again."

She continued down the hill, taking that winding Way which goes from where once loomed the mighty Etruscan citadel, past the gray walls of villas nodded over with pink roses, down to the city, and at every zigzag turn opens out to show you all Val d' Arno with Florence on its breast, lifting

her towers and spires as thickly as the lilies she supplanted. It is a Way where one may see a ghost in every tree and pluck memories plenteous as the roses on the walls, but Assunta, Fiesolana born and bred, knew and cared nothing for that. What was it to her if the feet of all the Etruscan Lars, of all the legions of Hannibal and Cæsar, of eager Catiline's followers, of the entire riotous Florentine nobility had preceded hers over these roads? What should it be to her that once a slender Mantuan scholar, with bent brows beneath the hood, paced here as every day of her life she saw the Frati doing?—or that a gay idler with the Decameronian chaplet about his head had strayed hither? Truly, nothing. She passed straight under the shadow of Lorenzo's villa and did not lift her eyes.

“ Seven lire—it could scarce be less—and boots and stockings—to say nothing of the ribbon for the garland. *Dio* will

that 'Tonio may keep about, and Gemma, it might yet be possible then. And who knows but the Signorina will have errands in the city."

Assunta's heart smote her a little even at the wish. They were the only things she had on her conscience toward the Signorina—those trips to town. She had never been rightly able to satisfy herself that when the Signorina dispatched her in haste for something, she was quite fair to the Signorina to take her tram-fare and walk the six miles to town and back. And the fact that the Signorina was none the wiser (for she found no fault, merely looked a little impatient and said "*Va bene!*" or some such phrase in her singular Italian) only half-soothed her conscience. But, what would you?—when times are so hard, to let an honest soldo pass you was little less than wicked; and the Virgin knew she never took a centesimo from the Signorina in all the market-



Anatolij

H.W.P.

ing, though the Signorina hardly glanced at the change if she had a pen in her hand—as she usually did. Still, it was with a shadow of compunction that she opened the gate of the villa and hurried upstairs.

The Signorina greeted her with the cordiality of one who has been impatiently waiting for breakfast a long time, and she poured the cream into her coffee and buttered her roll and began in a preoccupied way to eat it without her usual inquiries for the household on the hill ; for the Signorina was anxious and troubled about many things.

She had been casting up her accounts—never a good thing to do before breakfast—and had decided that beggary was near at hand. Not being born to it—like Tesita—the prospect depressed her spirits. Editors, she concluded, were a worthless set, and literature a profitless profession. Any number of unpleasant facts stared her in the face. Decidedly she

must give up the new summer hat and patronize second-best dressmakers—and the Signorina hated second-best things on principle as well as by instinct. The charming hem-stitched linen which the *ricamitrice* made for almost nothing must also be renounced—the Signorina looked disgustedly at the plain cloth on the table—and all like frivolous indulgences must be denied. She began to think, too, that she must make a rule of visiting the galleries on free days—a practice particularly abhorrent to the Signorina, whom Nature had so framed that she never felt a desire to look at a picture on Sundays, but hungered and thirsted after them on Saturdays and Mondays. She was so troubled at all these things that she did not look up until Assunta had twice said "Signorina!" in an accent of reproach.

"The Signorina is very naughty (*molto cattiva*)," said Assunta the third time. "She slept again with her window open."

"I have told you fifty times, Assunta," responded the Signorina, listlessly, "that I can't sleep at all without."

"And therefore the Signorina is *pallidissima* this morning," went on Assunta, calmly. "And it is bad for the eyes."

The Signorina opened hers widely.

"Nonsense; when there isn't a ray of light—not so much as a firefly."

"And now the Signorina eats nothing. Eat, eat, Signorina, and fatten."

Thus adjured, as she was three times a day, the Signorina—nowise remarkable for pallor or emaciation among her pallid countrywomen, but who, since she came to Italy, had often been made to feel that she was created in the image of a tallow-candle—made an effort to swallow the other half of her roll.

"How is your husband to-day, Assunta?" she asked, with languid interest.

"Badly, badly, Signorina," answered Assunta, cheerfully, cutting bread. "Po-

verino!—when he goes to work he walks so." She dramatically doubled herself up and limped a few steps, then, straightening up, pushed the butter toward the Signorina, saying cheerily: " Eat, eat, Signorina, *mia*."

" Goes to work? " echoed the Signorina, " but he has been in bed for weeks; how can he work? "

Assunta shrugged her shoulders.

" What would you? There were but two lire left remaining when we paid the *fornaio* Saturday, and the Signorina knows two lire is little for five persons."

" But there is always the straw-work? "

" Truly, yes (the Signorina is not eating)—there is the straw-work," assented Assunta. " Yesterday the Delia made twenty fans."

" Twenty fans! that must be a long day's work, Assunta? "

" From six to eight—every, *every*, EVERY minute, Signorina."

" Dear me ! " thought the Signorina, " *I* should like to make twenty fans a day —and sell them ! How much does she get for a fan, Assunta ? "

" A centesimo, Signorina."

The Signorina, with a spoonful of coffee at her lips, dropped it.

" A centesimo ! " she repeated.

" What misfortune ! " ejaculated Assunta, hastily wiping up the coffee.

While she did so the unmathematical Signorina made a hasty calculation. A centesimo is the fifth of a cent; twenty centesimi are four cents; then if one works " *every, every, EVERY* minute " for fourteen hours one may live to make four cents a day. " And the fans sell for a franc and a half or two francs apiece; *worse than literature !*" concluded the Signorina grimly to herself.

" It is not much," said Assunta, serenely, " but what would you ? The *fabbricante* makes all. The Giulia, how-

ever," she went on, encouragingly, " can now make from eight to ten arms of braid a day, and receives twenty-five centesimi for fourteen arms."

" And Gemma ? " suggested the Signorina, faintly.

" The Gemma makes three francs a week at the *fabbrica*, but—*poverina*!—she is always ill. The Signorina has eaten nothing ! "

The Signorina turned at the door of her room.

" And the gown for the first communion, Assunta ? " she asked.

Assunta clasped her hands.

" *Chi lo sa* !—it does not find itself—as yet."

" And the veil, the ribbon ? "

Assunta's face faded still more.

" The veil—and the ribbon—also the boots — do not find themselves either, Signorina," she replied, despondently.

The Signorina looked at the downcast countenance.

"Never mind!" she said, encouragingly. "I daresay they will, and, by and by, could you go to the city for me?"

"Willingly, Signorina!" responded Assunta, with alacrity; and as she spoke her heart smote her.

It smote her again when she stood in the Piazza San Domenico with the Signorina's franc in her hand. It would cost her eighty centimes to go and return, and the Signorina was wont to bestow the remaining twenty on her. The sun was at white heat; there stood the tram on one side, and on the other the winding Way of Boccacio, three miles of it, between stone walls which gathered the heat and reflected it straight to the lime-dust of the road. She hesitated; beholding on the one hand her waiting Signorina, who could do no more work without paper, and on the other the metre and a half of

ribbon which might be bought for eighty centimes.

"It is a sin to waste it and I will run every step of the way!" she thought, and set hastily off down the burning road.

"*Ecco, Signorina!*" she exclaimed, hours later, depositing a heavy package on the table before which the Signorina, in the thinnest of cool, white muslins, sat, feeling like a burden. She glanced at her messenger's purple face, but said nothing.

"How it is cool and fresh here!" remarked Assunta, easily, "but in those trams, *Dio mio*, what a heat! Here are the twenty centesimi." The Signorina pushed them silently back.

"Thank you," she said, gently.

"*Dio mio!*" moaned Assunta to herself as she toiled up the hill, "*Dio mio!* *Dio mio!*" She said it all the way until she came in sight of the little house on the hill-top, and Giulia bending over the

frame, her cheeks pale with the long, hot day's work.

Then Assunta's eyes brightened.

"*Guarda, Giulia!*" she exclaimed, joyously, holding up her franc, "the ribbon finds itself!"

Giulia, with a cry of delight, threw her arms about her; and the last sting of remorse vanished at that touch.

"I ran all the way," she said to herself, justifyingly.

"Gemma, oh, Gemma!" cried Giulia, darting to greet her as she dragged up the steps, and dancing about her. "The ribbon finds itself!"

She stopped short, perceiving Tesita, hot and dirty from a day's lolling in the dust, but with many soldi in her—or rather Beppe's—pocket. Tesita heard.

"Huh!" she said to herself, contemptuously. "Now she's got her old ribbon!"

Not for anything in the world would

Tesita have admitted to herself a pang of envy.

"Huh!" she said again, scornfully.

Assunta, smiling still with exultation and beginning to fan the fire for the *minestra*, paused to shake her head and murmur, as usual:

"*Niente di buona!*"

• • • • •

"*Dio mio!*" Assunta said it often, in the intervening weeks, as the days dragged along, loaded with calamities.

"*Dio mio!*" She said it very often.

First Tonio took to his bed, doubled up with rheumatism so that it was no longer possible to sit up—much less work. And instead of ten francs a week—"and he has been known to make as much as fourteen," said Assunta, with sad pride—there was nothing at all. And then—as if there were no reason in anything—his stomach refused the good food, bread and *minestra*, such as he had eaten

every day of his life, except such days as they had not been able to afford the *minestra*, when he ate the bread alone.

"Seven pounds and a half of bread and half a kilo of *minestra* every day," said Assunta, "and the bread a whole franc! The Signorina sees, what with a bit of *carbone* to cook the *minestra* and a drop of *petrolio* to work by nights, and the rent, it is not possible to live on much less than twelve francs, or even fourteen, a week."

The Signorina, grown expert in doing many little sums lately, computed rapidly: fourteen francs a week; one hundred and forty-five dollars a year; divide by five—twenty-nine dollars a year apiece; divide by twelve—two dollars and forty cents a month apiece. No, she did not find it unreasonable.

"But we must all work," said Assunta, "and if 'Tonio cannot eat he cannot work, and if he cannot eat good

bread—!" she looked as if divided between compassion and impatience.

The Signorina was no longer surprised at anything—even 'Tonio's unreason.

"*Buon giorno*, Signorina; has she slept well?" always greeted her ears, in the same tone of unvarying, cheerful interest, each morning. Assunta might have a trouble or two at heart, but who was she that she should bring her clouds into the Signorina's atmosphere? It was not until the Signorina herself, in the pauses of her type-writing or her writing, looked up and asked specific questions, that she extracted such news as there was.

"Yes, 'Tonio had taken to his bed again,' or '*Gemma* had again an abscess' (for people will even have afflictions that are not pretty or pleasing); but '*pazienza!* what would you?'

There was, in truth, a trouble at Assunta's heart. It was not the sickness—that she had known before. It was not

the lacking *minestra* nor the bread falling short—these she had lived through before; but a First Communion can neither be given up nor postponed. It represented all the *festas* of a girl's lifetime in one, and its robe took the place of a society belle's hundred party-gowns. Gemma had taken her communion thre eyears before, and the *bambina*—what a misery it would be if she should miss it! The *bambina* was working day in and out, and Delia made her score of fans nearly every day; but what with the baker, and now a plaster for 'Tonio and another for Gemma, and no wages—it was a desperate outlook for the gown. Assunta shut her eyes to it and went ahead.

What she did and didn't do those weeks, no one but herself precisely knew. The Signorina grew accustomed to seeing her arrive breathlessly, with the butter and cream and an apology—she had had a bit to do, or an errand to run, and the

Signorina would graciously "have patience." Or late in the evenings, when she had (presumably) been at home for hours, the Signorina strolling in the ilex-walks would hear a cheery "Good-evening, Signorina! a pleasant walk!" and behold her late servitor up to her elbows in the stone washing-trough, or ironing for dear life on a table set in the shrine beneath the life-size Crucifixion.

Once in a while—but rarely—the Signorina let fall some commiserating word.

"What would you?" was the invariable reply, accompanied by a shrug; "I have never been less poor, Signorina."

But as the days passed, bringing nothing but more debt and less hope, Assunta clasped her hands and dropped more than one tear upon that ironing-table, while she fervently implored the saints and Madonna for aid. The Madonna herself ought to take an interest in it, for surely she couldn't want Giulia to march in her pro-

cession wearing things so shabby that they could only be characterized by ending them in a scornful "*accio*," "*scarpaccio*," and the like.

Whether the Madonna took this view of it or not, one day Assunta fairly flew upstairs and announced joyfully:

"Signorina! Signorina! the veil finds itself!"

The Signorina dropped her pen and clapped her hands.

"It is most beautiful—and a gift!" Assunta continued, ecstatically. "So large and also long and beautiful—beautiful, Signorina!"

It is true, if dark clouds have silver linings, silver clouds have dark ones as often; the next morning Gemma coughed blood. Assunta's voice broke as she told it, and she wrung her hands passionately for a moment. "*Dio mio!* if it should be—all her father's people went so! *Che passione!*"

The Signorina looked helplessly about her.

"But Giulia is well," she said, "and Delia is never ill."

A shadow crossed Assunta's face.

"No danger!" she said, briefly, with the only approach to bitterness the Signorina ever heard.

Poor, homely, stupid Delia! the only one of the three always well and robust. While pretty Gemma—

The Signorina tried again; she too had coughed blood, but I hardly think her physicians would have recognized her case from her description. She was very eloquent over it. When she had finished Assunta regarded her respectfully, as a miracle, and the Signorina felt a little like a miracle herself. According to her it was less than nothing, if it were not indeed a healthy symptom, to cough blood; all the long-lived people she was able to remember had coughed for many years. One

could argue nothing from a trifle of that kind. Assunta was more than consoled.

"And the Signorina slept again with her window open!" she remarked, catching sight of it as she wiped away the last tear. "How naughty she is! And the veil, Signorina, you should see how it is beautiful!" she added, gayly, from the threshold, as she went.

The Signorina leaned back in her chair, deeply conscious that she had been making an idiot of herself.

"*Cosa vuole*—what would you?" she said to herself in Assunta's extenuating phrase, a little palely.

She was so tired that she underwent a revulsion later, and was glad when Assunta brought in strawberries for her to look at, and she could survey them discontentedly and find them poor, and dear at the price.

Assunta agreed that they ought to be far finer for the Signorina, and suggested that it might be well for her to go in

search of others at Fiesole—or even to the city.

Which brought the Signorina to her senses.

“This is my *festa*, Assunta,” said the Signorina, looking up from the pile of birthday letters and gifts on her table.

Assunta, with a copper water-jar in either hand, stopped short.

“Truly, Signorina! it is also mine!” she exclaimed. “And how many years has the Signorina?” she asked, with interest.

“Twenty-eight.”

The copper jars went down to the floor.

“Truly! How well the Signorina carries them!”

The Signorina, who never before had realized her antiquity, felt actually abashed.

“And how many years have you, Assunta?” she asked.

"I finish forty, Signorina."

In her turn the Signorina stared; twelve years only between herself and the worn, wrinkled, thin-haired, almost toothless woman before her.

"Yes, Signorina," went on Assunta, tranquilly. "Forty years ago my mother put me in the world. I was born on the roadside, the Signorina remembers, and she carried me home in her apron, so!" gathering up her blue apron to illustrate. Then letting it fall again: "And the Signorina has twenty-eight years! Who would believe it?"

"I think I should like some very nice strawberries for my *festa*—if you can go to the city for me," said the Signorina, to change the subject.

"Signorina, I am here to obey you," replied Assunta, gravely, in spite of her inward emotion. A whole franc toward the boots!

And while she was hurrying down the

hill and over the white road, the Signorina, in the midst of her pretty gifts and the pleasant mood they awakened, was experiencing an unwonted fit of benevolence.

"Poor Assunta!" she thought, "I should like to give her something for her *festa*—if I were not so poor;" and she fell to wondering what in all the world Assunta would best like to have. Not that edition of Shelley, surely, which had made her own eyes sparkle with delight, nor yet the dainty linen worked by dear hands; Assunta wanted nothing for herself.

"I know!" thought the Signorina, with conviction.

She went into her room, and sitting down before her bureau, drew out one by one the fourteen gowns which were its contents.

"I will certainly do it," she said to herself, and after some pondering she selected the plainest and the oldest—a white cashmere—and spread it out on her lap.

The smile of satisfaction deepened on her lips.

"I should not wear it six times more—and even if I *do* miss it," she said to herself, generously, "I should be willing to make a sacrifice now and then. I will certainly do it."

Her heart grew light. "How pleased Assunta will be!" She was so pleased with herself for thinking of it, that she shut up the other thirteen gowns gayly and went in to dinner, still smiling. There is nothing so sweet, the sages tell us, as a self-approving conscience.

One good action begets another.

"Does Gemma like strawberries?" asked the Signorina, languidly, as she filled her saucer for the third time, while Assunta stood beaming near.

"*Chi lo sa?*" answered Assunta, tranquilly.

At this remarkable reply the Signorina raised her eyes in astonishment.

"She has never tasted them," explained Assunta. "They are so dear—the Signorina knows—"

"Never tasted them!" repeated the Signorina. "Do not you have fruit—all the fruit you want—in Tuscany?"

"Oh, there is plenty of fruit, Signorina," responded Assunta, cheerfully, "but for poor people it costs too much. Sometimes," she added, "we have tasted figs; yes, more than once in my life have I eaten them fresh" (the Signorina had an instant vision of them, purple and luscious, and sixteen for a soldo), "but dried—never; as for oranges and other fruits—the Signorina knows what they cost—I and my people have never tasted them. Are not the strawberries good, that the Signorina is leaving them?"

"Give them to Gemma," said the Signorina, with a gesture of loathing, walking away.

Presently she returned with something



white in her arms, but no triumph in her expression.

"Assunta," she said, hesitatingly, "if you can use this for Giulia"—she laid it on the sofa.

Assunta fell on her knees before it.

"Don't!" said the Signorina, "don't!" and she fled.

"*Dio mio! Dio mio!*" murmured Asunta all the way up the hill, tears dropping through every smile, but not one upon the precious cashmere.

"Giulia, oh, Giulia! arrive below!" she shouted up the stairs, and then she opened her apron.

Oh, the rapture! Giulia laughed and cried for joy; Delia rejoiced unselfishly; Gemma, coughing painfully, came and looked wistfully—hers had not been so fine nearly; and this would have many, many tucks.

In their hearts all had begun to despair, but now that the dress had found itself the rest would surely follow. Giulia flew back to her frame, and her fingers flew also with fresh activity; from time to time she crept away to peep at the wonderful dress all wrapped away in paper, and then flew back again. Delia began

a new fan, and Gemma—pale Gemma—took up the straw in her thin fingers and began to weave a little basket for the Signorina. Even 'Tonio, on the strength of the great rejoicing, crept back to work the next day ; for he thought he might at least make enough for shoes for the *bambina*—and he did.

" If the Signorina can spare me," said Assunta, tremulous with pride, " Giulia is coming at half-past twenty-one o'clock to go to the city."

The Signorina looked up quickly. Could it be ?

The smile trembling on Assunta's lips ran over and overflowed her furrowed face—one might say her soul smiled.

" *Si*, Signorina," she answered the look ; " we go to buy the shoes, also the stockings, also"—her voice trembled with this culminating triumph—" the ribbon."

The Signorina clapped her hands.

" *Brava ! Brava !*"

Assunta moved softly and ecstatically about, doing her work; but that her mind was full of its own bliss the Signorina, tripping steadily away and affecting to hear nothing, could tell.

"Beautiful little things! beautiful little things!" she could hear her sigh ecstatically, as she lifted the Signorina's thrice-patched number fours and surveyed them with lingering admiration—perhaps picturing a pair as fair on Giulia's feet. And she spent a most unusual care upon the toilet-table and all its knick-knacks, as if they had a suddenly acquired relation through the splendors about to be Giulia's.

She kept that bright-eyed and exultant little maiden waiting long after the hour, while she scrupulously fulfilled every service; for nothing was permitted to take precedence of the Signorina's comfort. At length, however, they departed, Assunta quite stiff with importance, Giulia openly dancing at her side. They walked,

of course ; for who could dream of spending twice eighty centimes on a tram?—and what were six miles—with the boots at their end! Giulia looked about her secretly at the Piazza—she would have liked Tesita to see her going to the city to shop, just like a signorina ; but Tesita was not there.

The Signorina could scarcely wait for the next morning, but when it came she had her question out almost before she heard the door open.

“ The boots—are they beautiful, Assunta? And the ribbon ? ”

“ *If* they are beautiful, Signorina!—five lire they cost me in Florence! And the stockings, Signorina!—beautiful black ones for half a lira! As for the ribbon—two metres and a half—so wide, a franc and a half. Giulia is *pazza, pazza* with joy!—and the *sarta* finishes the dress at this hour—the Signorina will see if it is beautiful ! ”

"And Gemma—and 'Tonio ?'" asked the Signorina, smiling.

Alas ! why had she asked !

Assunta found her voice in a moment.

"*Chi lo sa*, Signorina ?" she said, sadly ; "the Gemma stays in bed this morning."

"And 'Tonio ?"

"'Tonio also stays in bed ; the good and the bad come always together—it is necessary to have patience."

"Tesita also is ill," announced Assunta, later in the day. "She has the *tifo*."

"Ah ! I hope she is not very ill," replied the Signorina.

"It would be better that she should die," said Assunta, with sorrowful sternness. "When a girl stays on the streets it is better that she dies ; she will come to nothing good. There are persons who will do anything for money." Then her indignation melting into a smile, she added :

"The Signorina will not forget that she

has promised—to-morrow at eight she will be in the Duomo?"

"She will not forget, Assunta; she will be there."

It had come at last, the great day; and, for a miracle of miracles, rain came not with it. Up on the hill-top they were stirring with the daylight, for how was it possible to sleep with those boots in plain sight and the knowledge of that gown in the drawer?

Giulia flew from room to room, but not more excitedly than her mother and Delia. The whole family convened to assist at the ceremony of dressing, and as article after article went on, Assunta, standing by, calculated the cost. That added immensely to the impressiveness.

First the beautiful black stockings: "Half a franc," murmured Assunta, breathlessly, as they were drawn on, slowly, without a jerk or a pull, lest they should

tear. Then the boots—miles too large and quite shapeless, for who would be so incredibly reckless as to buy boots for five francs only large enough for a foot as it is, and take no thought for next year or the year after? They had patent leather tips, however, and Giulia could hardly stand up in them for pride. Then came the skirt, with many tucks and all the fulness in front, as Fiesolan dresses are wont to have it; and the waist, also tucked in every possible direction, lengthwise and breadthwise, to allow for the years of letting out and down; naturally, one could not hope to have a second gown like this.

"Three francs for the *sarta* and half a franc for the buttons," commented Assunta, as Delia fastened them; for Giulia's fingers were useless, they shook so.

Then the veil: a splendid square of curtain muslin, falling quite to the bottom of the short skirt and gathered full about the rosy face under the ribbon garland.

"Two metres and a half—a franc and a half it cost," murmured Assunta.

There was yet something lacking, the white cotton gloves Gemma had worn three years before. Immensely large they made Giulia's slender brown hands look, and the fingers were worn through, but still they were truly magnificent.

They all stood off and gazed.

At last!—

"Ten lire and a half I spent for it!" said Assunta, with a sigh of unutterable content. "How much it is beautiful—*Quanto è bella!*"

"*Quanto è bella!*" The Signorina said the same words an hour later, as she entered the dim and still Duomo from the morning sunlight, and the sixteen little boys and twelve little brides of Heaven carried up their flowers to the Madonna.

Nearly all Fiesole was there, and not only priests and acolytes in due profu-

sion, but a bishop and an archbishop in white and gold before the altar.

The little brides knelt on one side and the little boys on the other, and twenty-eight pairs of small hands in gloves rested on the chancel railing; while twenty-eight heads bent devoutly, with now and then a furtive side-glance at one's veil to be sure it was down, or at one's ribbons to be sure they were still there.

The Bishop prayed and the archbishop exhorted; then the archbishop prayed and the bishop exhorted; and finally, after all the ceremony had been duly observed, the sixteen little boys went up two by two and knelt to receive the holy wafer. Then came the turn of the twelve little brides, and the prettiest of them all was Assunta's Giulia in the much-tucked dress, with the beautiful boots creaking as she went, and the long veil fluttering about the rosy face, sweetly serious for the moment and forgetful of all her finery, I



really think. The huge cotton gloves were devoutly folded over a white prayer-book, lent for the occasion. And as they went,

“ *Verbum caro, panem verum  
Verbo carnem efficit,  
Fitque Sanguis Christi merum  
Et si sensus deficit :  
Ad firmandum cor sincerum  
Sola fides sufficit,*”

rose the voices all about them.

Eight small brides had knelt and risen ; now it was Giulia's turn. The Signorina leaned forward ; two little figures knelt ; the archbishop popped something into two rosy mouths, opened like a bird's to be fed ; then two little figures rose and the next two advanced. The great moment was over ; Giulia had taken her first communion, and—

“ *O Salutaris Hostia ! qui cœli pandis ostia !*”  
sang the voices softly.

But all was not over ; not until each had

received a silver crucifix (to wear until one's second communion, eight days later), a pictured saint's card, a medal with a pink ribbon which the archbishop himself threw over the bent heads and the mammas and sisters stealthily adjusted from behind; and, last of all, a loaf of consecrated bread to take home for the *collazione* after the service. Then the archbishop blessed the little flock, and everyone pressed forward to see the little boys and the brides, but especially the brides, because they were so much more fine to see; and so, all whispering and admiring, the crowd poured from the Duomo, not forgetting to cross one's self with holy water at the font.

Giulia, escorted by a group of admiring friends, walked demurely, casting a glance to see if haply Tesita was witnessing her triumph; but Tesita was not there. The Signorina, however, was there and stopped to admire everything—from the white

gown and veil to the crucifix and medal. Then they started up the hill, the little bride blushing with pleasure and modesty,



her hands demurely clasping the book and all her train following. As they went up on one side, another little procession came down on the other—black-masked Brothers

of Mercy carrying a small black bier. Everyone stepped aside to let them pass, and Giulia crossed herself twice, like a pious little maiden, once at the crucifix, once at the bier. But nobody dreamed it was Tesita going by in such state, until the next day, when rosy Annina appeared on the piazza with Beppe and lisped out, "*Signorine—poverino!*" in funny imitation of Tesita. It was, however, "*a providenza*," Assunta declared then, "for it was certain she would have come to nothing good."

Far from any thought of Tesita, Giulia sped on up the steep hill till the little house came in sight; and there on the threshold, with such a face as the angels may wear, stood Assunta, watching the triumph of her child.

The little bride, finery and all, flew into her arms; oh, it had been so beautiful!

Assunta turned her beaming eyes upon the group. The Signorina had kept her

promise. She had seen it all—the procession to the Madonna—the archbishop—all; and it was beautiful, *non è vero?* Perhaps she had even seen the *bambina* take her communion, at the very moment itself.

The very precise moment, even to the opening and shutting of the rosy mouth; it had been most beautiful, and—

“Oh, Assunta, Assunta!” exclaimed the Signorina, taking the hard hand in hers, with sorrowful passion, “why were you not there?”

Assunta laughed, a little, short, happy, shame-faced laugh.

“Oh, *Signorina mia!*” she said, deprecatingly; “in this gown and these boots! how was it possible? But it was truly beautiful, was it not?” she added, gleefully. “And the Signorina saw my *bambina*;” her eyes rested proudly on the small white figure holding court in the dingy room.

Never was such a day! To be sure, there was no collation—it had been manifestly impossible to compass that; but the neighbors came flocking all day long to admire and declare that within memory there had not been a prettier communicant—no, nor one that deserved better.

'Tonio sat proudly by, and Gemma, propped up among pillows, listened and shared unenviously in her little sister's triumph, while Delia ran about waiting on everybody. As for Assunta, she only stood and smiled and smiled. Never was such a day!

But the longest and the happiest day must end at last, and presently the white gown was taken off—oh, how carefully—and folded away against the festa of Corpus Domini, and the veil was also laid away, and the fine prayer-book sent home, while the beautiful boots were stood on the bureau where everyone could look at them.

Then the soft night of Tuscany came down—luminous and fragrant and alive with silence—and everybody slept.

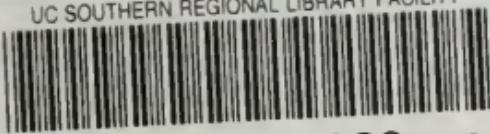
Tesita, alone for the first time in her life in the *stanza mortuaria*, slept with wide-open eyes and the sound of slowly dripping water near by. And in the house on the hill-top, worn out with excitement, all slept. 'Tonio, forgetful of his rheumatism, and tired Delia, and even Gemma ceasing to cough for a time, lay sleeping with the little red-stained handkerchief in her hot hand. In the other room Giulia, clasping the silver crucifix, dreamed that it was already Corpus Domini. But Assunta, a smile of fathomless content still on her thin lips, slept dreamlessly—the sleep of profound exhaustion.

Only the Signorina down in the villa could not sleep for thinking of many things.





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